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A HISTORY OF  
BRITISH  
TRADE UNIONS  
SINCE 1889



A HISTORY OF  
BRITISH  
TRADE UNIONS  
SINCE 1889

VOLUME III · 1934-1951

BY

HUGH ARMSTRONG CLEGG

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## Preface

I am happy to have been able to complete this third volume of *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889*. Including, as it does, the recovery of their strength by the unions after the economic depression of 1929-33 and their opposition to fascism in the later 1930s; followed by their substantial contribution to the Allied victory in the war years; and next the crucial part which they played in the construction of the Welfare State under the post-war Labour Government, the whole period is unquestionably that of the greatest achievement of British trade unionism.

I have also to record my gratitude to those who have helped me with the writing of this volume, above all to A. F. Thompson, co-author of Volume I, who also played a substantial part in the revision of Volume II. He again read the typescript of this volume and made many corrections and suggestions for improvement. My former colleague at Warwick University, Richard Hyman, performed a similar service on this volume. The major source of trade union records which I used was the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University, directed by Richard Storey, and thanks are due to him and his staff. Successive drafts of the volume were skilfully and patiently typed by Annemarie Flanders, to whom I also record my gratitude.

In addition I have to thank the Trades Union Congress for the photograph of Ernest Bevin addressing the Trades Union Congress, which is reproduced on the jacket.

H. A. C.





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# I

## Collective Bargaining 1934-1939

THE two previous volumes of this history, covering 1889 to 1910 and 1911 to 1933, opened with chapters outlining the state of British trade unions prior to the beginning of their periods. The years 1889 and 1911 brought departures in British trade-unionism, with the 'new unionism' of 1889 and the series of 'strikes on a scale not previously experienced'<sup>1</sup> from 1911, and therefore it was necessary to outline what had gone before to put them into context. However, there is no need for a similar introduction to this volume because there was no sharp turn in the development of British trade-unionism in 1934. For several years previously the main influence on the unions had been the world-wide economic depression which began in 1929. Whether the trough of this depression was located in 1931 or 1932, a slow recovery was certainly in progress by the end of 1933. Unemployment was falling, with the consequence that trade union membership began to increase again in 1934, after several years of continuous decline. But this change, while most welcome to the unions, did not bring any rapid alterations in other aspects of their behaviour, and the concluding chapter of volume ii, 'Trade Unions in 1933', would need few amendments of any substance to apply to the unions in 1934. There were events in Germany in 1934 that were to have profound consequences for British trade unions, as for the British people and for the world, but they had still to unfold.

One respect in which rising employment might have been expected to bring change to the unions was in the pay of their members. During the years of depression the unions had been forced to accept reductions in pay, in most instances two reductions and sometimes even more, and they were certainly keen to reverse the trend. However, although prices ceased to fall in 1933 and the official cost-of-living index in December was the same as a year earlier, the number of workers affected by wage reductions in that year exceeded those who received increases by a substantial margin. This was not due to the negotiation of pay cuts by trade unions and employers. In fact the changes in pay that were achieved by negotiation in 1933—for workers in heavy chemicals and explosives, for lower-paid workers in cotton-spinning, and for London

<sup>1</sup> H. A. Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, ii. 1911-1933 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 24.

tramwaymen, some 80,000 in all—were increases. The more considerable changes during the year were the consequence of existing agreements which related wage movements to prices. Most workers in iron and steel were covered by agreements relating their pay to the selling price of their products, and 100,000 of them benefited from rising iron-and-steel prices during the year. However, the total number of workers affected by wage increases in 1933 was far exceeded by the nearly half a million building workers whose pay was reduced under their agreement to vary wages with changes in the cost-of-living index. Such agreements prescribed that movements of a given number of points in the index should trigger an adjustment in pay. It was therefore possible for a modest fall in the monthly figure to trigger a pay reduction, and for the index to rise again later in the year without reaching the figure required to trigger a compensating increase. As the formulae set out in cost-of-living sliding-scale agreements varied from one industry to another, it was also possible for pay to move in different directions in two such industries in the same year, so long as the overall change in the index was relatively small. As it happened, no workers gained increases under such agreements in 1933, but, in addition to building workers, some 80,000 textile-finishing workers experienced small pay reductions under their agreement. Consequently the number of workers affected by pay reductions in that year was three times the number of those affected by increases.

Thereafter the trend was definitely upwards, although the number of workers who received pay increases during 1934 was relatively small. But from this point it may be more convenient to consider the progress of collective bargaining over pay and other issues industry by industry.

### *Engineering*

In general, engineering may be seen as a group of different industries making a variety of products—cars, aircraft, electrical goods, marine engines, and so on—but for the purpose of industrial relations it is regarded as a single industry. This is not so much due to the same unions operating in the various branches of engineering, for several of the unions also operate in industries outside engineering. The main reason was that industrial relations in engineering were handled by a single employers' organization with which the unions deal on behalf of their members. This organization was the Engineering Employers' Federation, or the Engineering and Allied Employers' National Federation as it was still officially called in 1934. For the purpose of this volume, the engineering industry is defined as the firms that were members of the federation, together with non-federated firms that



carried on business in the same branches of industry. In 1934 the federation had a membership of over 1,800 firms, which employed just under half a million manual workers.

Official overall figures for employment and union membership in engineering are not available. The government's standard industrial classification includes engineering along with shipbuilding and ship-repairing, iron and steel, and other metal industries in a metals-and-engineering group. In 1934 employment (manual and white-collar) in this group was almost 2.3 million, of which engineering probably accounted for about 1.5 million. Trade union membership was over 577,000, taking second place to coalmining which returned 616,000 union members for that year; but by 1939, with the rapid growth of several branches of engineering, much of it due to rearmament, union membership in metals and engineering had reached almost 1 million in a labour force of 2.8 million. Union membership in coalmining then stood at 742,000, putting metals and engineering well ahead, although union density—the proportion of employees who were members of trade unions—was still far higher in coalmining than in metals and engineering. By 1939 the membership of the Engineering Employers' Federation was over 2,000 firms, with 861,000 manual employees.<sup>2</sup>

Engineering was one of the two major British industries<sup>3</sup> in which there had been no reduction since 1929 in the agreed rates of pay for hours worked by manual workers during the normal working week. Instead, the Engineering Employers' Federation had in 1931 exacted from the unions substantial reductions in overtime and night-shift payments, and a cut in the target earnings that its agreement prescribed for the setting of piece-work prices. Previously these prices were required to enable 'a workman of average ability to earn 33⅓ per cent over time rates' (excluding war bonus). The new figure was 25 per cent. These changes, and especially the last, may have enabled many engineering firms to make economies in their labour costs on much the same scale as was achieved in other industries by reductions in the hourly rate.

In 1934 the engineering unions once more began to seek concessions from the employers on behalf of their members. The process of negotiation in engineering was a leisurely affair. The employers' federation recognized over forty unions as having the right to represent their manual employees. Most of these unions represented skilled

<sup>2</sup> Figures for trade union membership and employment here and in subsequent chapters are taken from G. S. Bain and Robert Price, *Profiles of Union Growth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980; and those for members of the Engineering Employers' Federation and the numbers of their employees from Eric Wigham, *The Power to Manage* (London: Macmillan, 1973), app. J.

<sup>3</sup> The other was printing (see below).

workers in one or more trades, although several—including the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Foundry Workers, and the Electricians—also recruited less-skilled workers, and two of them—the Transport and General Workers and the General and Municipal Workers—normally confined themselves to the less-skilled. Most of the unions, excluding the Engineers and the Foundry Workers but including the two general unions, were affiliated to the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades, which in 1936 became the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, but, since the Engineers probably had in their membership as many engineering employees as all the federated unions together, their absence from the federation gravely weakened its status as a bargaining agent in the engineering industry.

There had therefore developed a practice of calling meetings of all the unions, under the title of the Engineering Joint Trades Movement, to co-ordinate dealings with the employers' federation over general issues. A proposal for an alteration in the industry's agreements from the union side therefore generally originated with the governing body of the Engineers, its national committee—consisting of two lay members elected from each of its twenty-six territorial divisions—whose annual meetings were held in May. This body could instruct the union's executive body, the national executive council, consisting of the president and seven councilmen, to seek specified concessions from the employers. The executive, aware that it would not be likely to secure a concession from the employers unless it could speak for the other unions as well, would then arrange for a meeting of the Engineering Joint Trades Movement. Given the weight of the Engineers' membership, that meeting could be expected to endorse the submission of the claim, and a meeting with the negotiating committee of the employers' federation would next be arranged to present the claim. The executive body of the federation, the management board, would normally consider the substance of the claim before the date of the presentation, but wait until after the presentation to take any action on it. It might then decide to reject it forthwith. Otherwise it would submit a proposal, or alternative proposals, to its constituent local associations, asking them to poll their members. The results would be reported to the federation's final authority, the general council, for an authoritative decision, normally on a recommendation from the management board.

In 1933 the Engineers' national committee instructed its executive to submit a claim to the employers for a forty-hour working week in place of the existing forty-seven-hour week. This proposal had been an item in a list of claims drawn up by the national committee in 1929 entitled the 'Engineers' Charter', and its submission in 1933 seems to have been

part of a propaganda campaign to increase membership rather than a proposal that the national committee seriously expected the employers to entertain.<sup>4</sup> The submission of the claim was arranged for 15 February 1934. It was considered by the management board on 25 January. Its minutes record: 'It was felt desirable that any feelings of optimism on the part of the Unions should be obviated and that for this purpose the Chairman of the Special Negotiating Committee should make a suitable short reply without indicating that the Employers had arrived at any conclusion.' The claim was duly presented by Jack Little, the Engineers' president, arguing that it was justified by the rapid progress of productivity in the industry. The employers' management board took two meetings in March to compose its rejection of the claim, which was duly delivered to the unions.

In May 1934 the Engineers' national committee's instruction to its executive was to claim a wage increase, and the restoration of overtime and night-shift rates, and of the minimum piece-work percentage, to the level at which they had stood before the 1931 cuts. The claim was endorsed by the joint trades movement and presented to the employers' negotiating committee towards the end of the year. By this time economic recovery was proceeding rapidly. The general unemployment figure was 16 per cent in December 1934 compared with the peak of 23 per cent in August 1932, and some branches of engineering were doing substantially better than that. For July 1934 the figure for motor vehicles, cycles, and aircraft was 10.6 per cent and for electrical engineering 7.4 per cent. Not surprisingly, the management board decided it would have to give the unions something. Meeting on 17 January 1935, it decided to refuse restoration of conditions, but

the great majority of members present were opposed to refusing any concession. . . . there had been an improvement in trade in large sections of the industry, and the indications were that the employers could make a settlement now on better terms than they would be able to do six months later. In order to reach an early settlement they were prepared to suggest a very moderate increase.

The chairman said that he thought that the unions might accept an increase of 10p a week on the war bonus, 5p to be paid from May and 5p from July. A ballot paper was accordingly drawn up for circulation to the associations proposing the rejection of the claim for restoration of conditions. It evoked the highest number of votes recorded for many years 'unanimously opposed' to conceding the claim. Meanwhile the negotiating committee explored with the unions whether they were

<sup>4</sup> James B. Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers, 1800-1945* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1946), 243.

willing to modify their claim. In April another ballot was held by the employers' federation on the proposal for a pay increase of 5p a week in May and another 5p in July which gave a majority in favour of 7,380 to 18. Many of the members may have been relieved that the proposed increase was no higher.

The increase was in the 'war bonus'. Since 1917 the hourly or weekly rates of pay of engineering workers had consisted of two parts, a basic rate and a war bonus. The first was the figure used for calculating 'premium' payments for overtime, shift-work, and so on, and the piece-worker's minimum percentage. It was settled district by district, whereas the bonus was negotiated nationally. For the piece-worker the war bonus was a flat-rate payment added on to his piece-work earnings. A further complication was that an agreement between the unions and the employers in 1927 had granted an increase of 10p a week to time-workers only, and this differential remained in force in 1935. The status of district rates had not been clearly defined in a general agreement.

Broadly, the basis for the rating of workmen remains, in federated firms, what it was in the 1907 [National] Agreement. The employer may employ workpeople at rates which are mutually satisfactory, and in deciding the rates for skilled men shall have regard to those generally paid in the district for such classes of labour. The trade unions can fix the rates of wages at which their members may accept work, and general alterations in district rates are to form the subject of negotiation between the local Association of Engineering Employers and the trade union representatives.<sup>5</sup>

In practice, however, there was very little doubt as to the rate appropriate to a given class of worker, whether it was settled by a district agreement, or accepted by custom. Piece-work prices were settled under an agreement of 1898 which laid down that they 'shall be fixed by mutual agreement between the employer and the workman or workmen who perform the work', subject, since 1931, to the guarantee of 25 per cent over the district time-rate for the 'workman of average ability'.

The next claim from the unions originated from the Engineers' national committee in May 1935, the month in which the last claim had been finally settled, and reached the employers that December. The joint trades movement repeated its demand for the restoration of the pre-1931 conditions and asked for an increase in pay of 15p a week. In the spring of 1936 the employers' negotiating committee offered 5p a week in June and the same amount in September, in accordance with the mandate it had received from the local associations. However, the unions stood out for their 15p, although they were prepared for it to be

<sup>5</sup> M. L. Yates, *Wages and Labour Conditions in British Engineering* (London: MacDonald & Evans, 1937), 65.



paid in two instalments, and insisted on some concession on the restoration of conditions. Their intransigence was justified by its results. The negotiating committee reported to the management board on 21 May that it was 'satisfied that they could not effect a settlement within the terms of their mandate', and were authorized to reach a settlement 'which they would regard as reasonable and appropriate in the circumstances', subject to confirmation. A further meeting with the union representatives led to a joint recommendation for 5p in June, 5p in September, and 5p in December, along with a small concession on night-shift rates. These terms were ratified by both sides.

Whether as a consequence of granting the full amount sought by the unions in their 1935 claim (though by instalments) or because the negotiations had been even more protracted than in previous years, the employers did not receive the next claim from the joint trades movement until April 1937. On this occasion the unions wanted 20p a week and full restoration of the pre-1931 conditions, along with a further concession: the consolidation of the national bonus into basic rates, which would have brought substantial increases in all payments related to the basic rate, including overtime, shift-work and piece-rates. To this the Engineers added a separate claim of their own, for a week's holiday with pay each year. The subject of holidays with pay had been forced on the attention of the employers in May 1936 when Lord Nuffield, whose firm, Morris Motors, was not at that time federated, had announced that it was introducing a week's holiday with pay each year for employees with one year's service, and two weeks for those with five or more years' service. The management board was horrified. Although it had not issued instructions that members must not grant holidays with pay to their employees, it had rejected the principle 'over and over again' and 'Federation sentiment was dead against it'. The board sent its chairman to see whether the scheme could be amended to yield the same benefits but not in the form of holidays with pay.<sup>6</sup> But nothing could be done, and in March 1937 the Minister of Labour gave the cause of holidays with pay a further advertisement when he appointed a committee of inquiry under the chairmanship of Lord Amulree 'to investigate the extent of paid holidays and the possibility of extending the provision of such holidays by statutory enactment or otherwise'.

The management board suggested that the topic could be left until the committee had reported, but the Engineers pressed for a reply. The employers were therefore asked whether they were in favour of conceding one week's holiday with pay a year, and, if so, whether it should be incorporated in the settlement of the current pay-claim.

<sup>6</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (21 May 1936).

Whatever the views of federated firms on holidays with pay might have been a year earlier, on this occasion they voted for both propositions by large majorities. As for the other items put forward by the joint trades movement, it accepted the negotiating committee's request to be allowed to make some concessions, and agreed to leave the details to the committee, along with the employers' management board, subject to their General Council's approval. On 24 July 1937 the general council was informed that, after negotiations which 'while of a friendly character, were prolonged', the two sides had agreed on two increases of 7½p each, one in August and the other in November, a week's holiday with pay, and a joint committee to investigate the consolidation of the national bonus.

The final series of negotiations prior to the war were complicated by the resignation of the Engineers from the joint trades movement in the autumn of 1937. The president of the Engineers also held the office of chairman of the joint trades movement.<sup>7</sup> A meeting of the movement had been arranged to discuss negotiations concerning apprentices, boys, and youths while he was in the United States, and the union had asked to be allowed to appoint a deputy from within its ranks to take his place. 'The nature of the reply', reported the Engineers' executive council, 'and the total disregard for the extent to which our Union was affected, caused your Executive Council to sever its connection with this body.'<sup>8</sup> The consequence was that the federation had to deal with separate pay-claims from the joint trades movement and the Engineers in 1938, and the Foundry Workers decided to submit their claim along with that of the Engineers.

The claims were notified in June 1938. On 22 September the employers' negotiating committee listened to the Engineers and the Foundry Workers in the morning and to the joint trades in the afternoon. As this was the time of the Munich crisis, the meetings were adjourned without fixing a date for resumption. In November the federated firms voted by overwhelming majorities against granting concessions either on pay or on conditions; but when, after further discussions between the negotiating committee and the unions, they were asked in April 1939 whether the federation should continue to reject the claims, and resist whatever action the unions might take, or continue to negotiate and submit whatever terms might be agreed to the local associations, they voted by almost equally impressive majorities for continuing the negotiations. In May agreement was reached for an increase of 10p a week in what was now called the 'national bonus'. Since 1934 there had been a total increase of 50p in the bonus, and,

<sup>7</sup> At this stage the incumbent was W. H. Hutchinson, who had succeeded J. T. Brownlie in 1931.

<sup>8</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (Nov. 1937).

since the bonus was paid to all adult males, there had therefore been a substantial percentage narrowing of differentials.

The settlement of the bonus and of general conditions of employment, such as hours of work and overtime payments, were the only negotiations that affected all adult male engineering workers, but there were many other issues affecting particular groups of adult male engineering workers that were subject to negotiation at national or district level, or, in some instances, at both levels. First, there was the other part of the pay-packet of all male engineering workers—the district rate—which was subject to district negotiation. In Manchester, for example, in January 1937 a district rate of £2.40 applied to fitters, turners, and automatic-lathe operators who set up and operated their machines, to blacksmiths with single-handed fires, and to a considerable number of other skilled grades. Other workers had higher rates, including toolroom fitters and turners and toolmakers at £2.50 and coppersmiths at £2.55. The highest rates were £2.60 for patternmakers and £2.62½ for brass-moulders. Lower down the scale came workers who were classed as semi-skilled, such as lathe-operators who had their machines and work set up for them, at £1.75. Although these rates were set in the district, the Engineering Employers' Federation considered that it also had an interest in the matter. On 23 May 1935 it noted that employers in some districts were having difficulty in recruiting craftsmen, but doubted whether a general increase in their district rates was the appropriate remedy. 'The Board saw very great difficulty in making adjustments in district rates without starting a movement towards a general levelling-up . . . a movement which the Trade Unions have been aiming at for years.' It therefore wanted to exercise some supervision over the negotiation of district rates. If a local association rejected a claim from the unions at a local conference, and the union persisted with the claim, it would automatically be passed to a central conference at which the federation's conference committee would be able to approve or reject it.

However, the management board was more concerned that local associations might be inclined to make concessions, especially if some of their members were anxious to recruit more skilled men. Its first proposal was that a local association that wanted to agree to a pay increase should consult its regional committee—the intermediate step in the structure of the federation between the local association and head office—which would then be able, if it wished, to submit a case to the management board, which 'would consider each case on its merits'. The weakness of this suggestion was that the unions could even then insist on the claim being referred to central conference, and the employers' conference committee was far from eager to shoulder the responsibility



for settling such cases, which, they believed, 'were so closely allied to national considerations that the subject could best be discussed between the Unions and the National Negotiating Committee of the Federation'.<sup>9</sup>

A test case was provided by a dispute in Derby, where Rolls-Royce employed 85 per cent of the engineering labour force and effectively was the local association. It had rejected a claim for increased district rates, and union members had voted to strike. The issue was adjourned for a fortnight to allow the management board to discuss it with the unions. At the end of this period the board approved an increase of 5p a week in Derby district rates, and 'to assist the Union representatives to make a joint recommendation, the Employers were prepared to agree to the piece-work prices being increased pro rata'.<sup>10</sup> The alternative would have been a wholesale retiming of jobs to discover whether increased prices would be justified under the national piece-work agreement, and since almost all the workers at Rolls-Royce were on piece-work, that might have led to further unrest. The strike was called off.

This incident aroused the interest of the union head offices in the question of 'local wage applications of a general character', as it was now termed, and the joint trades committee asked to meet the management board to discuss it. The talks were delayed, but eventually, towards the end of 1936, it was agreed that the normal procedures for handling disputes should not apply to these claims. Instead, if a local conference failed to agree, the case should not be referred to a central conference between union representatives and the federation conference committee, but instead to a meeting between union representatives and a special national committee of the federation, from whose decision there should be no appeal, except, of course, to industrial action. Union leaders were not unanimously in favour of this arrangement. When the executive council of the Engineers discussed it, on 7 January 1936, Jack Tanner, who was to be elected president in 1939, wanted to do without any national conference, leaving it to the local conference to decide the issue.

Another device used by the federation to keep 'local applications of a general character' in check was to insist on a clause in national wage agreements imposing a moratorium on the submission of such applications for a period after the agreements came into operation. The 1936 agreement prescribed a standstill for six months, and the 1937 agreement a standstill of three months. Not all district wage claims were of 'a general character'. Some were made on behalf of particular occupations, and in this period a number of them were put forward on

<sup>9</sup> Management Board, *Minutes*, (2 July 1935).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* (31 Oct. 1935).

behalf of toolroom workers, who were recognized as highly skilled, and occupied a critical position in the engineering production process. On 25 January 1934 the federation's management board considered a report from Coventry where the Engineers had asked for an inclusive rate of £4 for skilled toolroom workers. The Coventry association reported that these workers were paid no less than £3.50 a week 'in one form or another' and there was 'considerable lack of uniformity . . . as regards such vital matters as base rates, method of make-up, by way of "lieu rate", merit, or as the case may be, generally'. The association had been encouraging the use of piece-work to increase toolroom earnings, but its members wanted 'some recognised basis of payment' where piece-work was not practicable; and it proposed a basic rate of £2.40 with a lieu rate (in lieu of piece-work) of 25 per cent which, with the appropriate 50p war bonus, would amount to £3.50. Merit rates would also be allowed, but, said the association, they were 'purely a domestic matter', subject, it hastened to add, 'to being submitted to and approved by the Association'.

The management board appreciated that local labour shortage presented its Coventry members with an 'extremely difficult situation', and that the proposed 'scheme, while it cannot have the Federation's approval', and must not be negotiated with the union, 'is designed to overcome abuses which have crept into practice'. It apparently envisaged that Coventry employers would apply the scheme without the union's agreement, for it asked to hear 'how the scheme progressed'. However, after the Engineers had referred its £4 claim to central conference, where it was rejected, they were offered the £3.50 'all-in' rate. They, in their turn, rejected it, confident, no doubt, that their Coventry members could increase their pay for themselves by continued pressure within their firms; and that is what happened. On 25 June 1939 the management board was told that the Engineers were claiming a toolroom rate of £5.50 a week in Coventry and that some toolroom workers there were earning £8 and £9 a week. The claim went to central conference, where the conference committee referred it to the management board because it doubted whether Coventry employers would 'stand firm' if the claim was rejected. The management board's suggestion was that it be referred back to the Coventry association to see if something could be worked out locally.

In some instances the unions dealt directly with the federation over occupational claims. On 28 January 1937 the management board considered a claim by the United Patternmakers for an increase in their members' pay. They proposed to institute a district differential over the fitter's rate of 25p a week (in many districts the current differential was 20p) 'except in those districts where the Federation considers special



circumstances apply', and to ask federated firms to examine the possibility of introducing payment by results for patternmakers. A month later, on 25 February, the board was informed that unofficial consultations with the union to discover whether the 25p was enough had elicited the reply that the union doubted it and suggested 30p. Nevertheless the board decided on 25p and added the proviso that the union should undertake to make no more claims that year.

The following year it was the turn of the moulders, represented by the Foundry Workers, who proposed that their weekly district rate should be increased to £2.50. Apparently current differentials over the fitter's rate varied considerably from several shillings in Scotland and the North-east to nothing in the South and the West. On 26 May 1938 the management board agreed that districts with a moulder's rate of £2.45 should be allowed to increase it to £2.50. Other local associations that believed their rate to be too low should be allowed to increase it but not as high as £2.50, and they must not prejudice 'surrounding districts'. Claims for increases in district rates were not confined to skilled occupations. On 18 March 1938 the management board discussed a proposal submitted by the two general unions for a minimum district rate of £1.65 for engineering labourers and £1.90 in London, with an additional 15p for foundry labourers. On 27 May the board was told that difficulties over the labourers' rate were for the most part confined to Lancashire where rates varied between £1.40 and £1.47½, whereas 'few comparable districts' paid less than £1.50; and that the Lancashire districts were considering raising their rates to £1.50.

In 1936 the same two unions had been joined by the Engineers in a demand for a rationalization of the rates paid to machinists. This was an issue that had been under debate since the First World War without any progress towards its resolution. The union view was that machines should be graded according to the skill required for their operation and rates of pay fixed accordingly for those who manned them. The employers insisted that two other criteria must affect the rate of pay: the task actually being performed by the machine, and the skill of the operator. The unions presented their case at a conference on 25 November 1936, which failed to agree and was adjourned until 23 February 1937 when the director of the federation, Alexander Ramsay, told the unions that their proposals were unsound. He also drew attention to the high earnings of many machinemen.<sup>11</sup> The unions continued to press their case, telling the employers that they could demonstrate good reasons for an alteration in the current method of setting rates for machinists. Accordingly, on 27 October 1938, the

<sup>11</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (Mar. 1937).

management board agreed to set up a joint committee to consider the matter further. It seems that the committee did not resolve the question. Certainly no agreement was concluded on the 'machine question'.

In addition to occupational pay-claims, wage increases were sought for a whole section of engineering workers—those in the aircraft industry. This claim arose out of the agitation of an 'unofficial movement', the Aircraft Shop Stewards' national committee (whose origins and development will be considered in Chapter 2). The rapid expansion of the aircraft industry from 1934 onwards as part of the rearmament programme gave the workers in this industry exceptional opportunities to increase their earnings at plant level, and encouraged them to believe that there was no reason why their basic rates of pay should be held back to the amounts that were negotiated between the joint trades movement and the employers' federation for all engineering workers. Accordingly their shop stewards agitated within their unions for a separate wage-claim to be submitted on behalf of aircraft workers.

The construction of aircraft involved the making of engines and the building of airframes. The Engineers were the major union involved in the first of these tasks, and, with the shift from wooden to steel frames, the Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers were gradually replacing the woodworking unions in the second. All these unions decided to make special claims for pay increases for aircraft workers. In 1936 the Engineers' national committee instructed its executive council 'to negotiate Agreements either individually or collectively with aircraft employers and/or their associations', which should include a substantially increased rate along with a restoration of the pre-1931 conditions. The Sheet Metal Workers proposed an all-round increase of 50p and the national council of Aircraft Workers (which consisted of seven woodworking unions) sought an unspecified increase. Having considered these claims at a special meeting on 21 January 1937, the federation's management board decided to insist that aircraft manufacture was part of the engineering industry so that the grievances of its employees had to be handled through the engineering procedure. The unions presented their cases at conferences held on 9 and 18 February 1937. The director of the federation told the management board on 25 February that 'certain reasons . . . made it desirable that the Federation's reasoned reply should not be given until later in the year'. The claims were rejected in May, and the meeting of the management board on the 27th of that month was told that the earnings of the members of the Engineers' and Sheet Metal Workers' unions in aircraft manufacture had shown 'a remarkable increase over the last twelve months'. Whether or not the purpose of the delay was to allow that increase to be appreciated by aircraft workers, the success of their shop stewards in

plant bargaining had taken the steam out of their pressure for a wage increase through national negotiation.

All the negotiations in the engineering industry mentioned so far refer to the wages and conditions of adult male workers. Questions affecting apprentices and other junior male workers (referred to as 'youths') were settled by the districts. This arrangement came under review in July 1936 when the management board pointed out to the local associations that apprentices' wages had not been changed in many areas 'for something like ten or fifteen years', and asked them to consider the matter. Their replies apparently indicated that the existing pay scales for apprentices were 'operating satisfactorily'.<sup>12</sup> The unions were also showing an interest in apprentices. Following a discussion between the joint trades movement and the employers' federation on the definition of an 'adult male worker', a meeting of union executives at York decided to refer the whole question of apprentices to a committee, which was to report back.<sup>13</sup> Before that could be done, the apprentices themselves had acted decisively. On 18 March 1937 apprentices at a small firm in Paisley, on the Clyde, struck for a pay increase and were granted an additional 10p a week. Other strikes followed and on 31 March 500 apprentices stopped work at Fairfields shipyard, in Govan. By 2 April over 4,000 apprentices were on strike along the Clyde. A delegate meeting was called, a strike committee was elected, and pickets were organized.

The Clyde was one of the districts that had not altered apprentices' wages for fifteen years, and their scale, rising from 58<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>p a week in the first year to £1.25 a week in the fifth and final year, was a scale of *maximum* wages. Moreover, this was not the only, or necessarily the worst, grievance of the Clyde apprentices. 'The dominant conception of apprentices which developed in the 1920s was that they constituted no more than a low-cost, mobile labour force.' Many of them had no indentures, and those employers who continued to use indentures adopted 'a form of contract which gave the employer all the disciplinary benefits of the traditional indenture, but did not include any reciprocal obligations towards the apprentice'.<sup>14</sup> On 8 April the strikers drew up an 'Apprentices' Charter', including a wage scale from 75p to £1.50 a week, paid day release to pursue their studies, a reasonable ratio of apprentices to craftsmen, and the right to be represented by their trade unions. Already on 23 March the joint trades movement had submitted a claim to the employers' federation for its constituent unions to be recognized

<sup>12</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (24 Sept. 1936).

<sup>13</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (Dec. 1936).

<sup>14</sup> Alan McKinley, 'From Industrial Serf to Wage Labourer: The 1937 Apprentice Revolt in Britain', *International Review of Social History*, 31 (1986), 4.



as the appropriate bodies to represent apprentices and youths. The Engineers' executive council decided to pay strike benefit to the few Clyde apprentices who were members of the union, but not to call out its adult members in sympathy with the strikers. However, when the Clyde engineering employers refused a local conference to discuss the apprentices' demands, the district committee of what was now the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions called a one-day strike for 16 April when 30,000 adult engineering workers came out. Still refusing to negotiate, the local employers instituted a new scale of pay for apprentices of 62½p to £1.35 a week, as *minimum* rates. The local officials of the Engineers advised the apprentices to return to work; and they did so on 5 May. According to the Ministry of Labour's figures, the 10,000 apprentices who struck on the Clyde accounted for the loss of 240,000 working days, making theirs the largest engineering strike in this period by a considerable margin.

National negotiations over the claim for union recognition to represent apprentices continued for the rest of the year. On 6 September another strike of apprentices for increased pay broke out in Manchester, followed by others in Coventry, London, and Leeds. Altogether they accounted for some 160,000 lost working days. A meeting of apprentice delegates in Manchester decided to call a national apprentices' strike on 18 October. The strike did not take place, but by this time the engineering employers were ready to settle. In November their members voted by an overwhelming majority in favour of a settlement in principle, and in the following month an even more impressive majority approved the details. Henceforth apprentices were to be paid a proportion of the adult skilled rate, rising to 50 per cent in their last year. Indentured apprentices were not to be included in the agreement, but they were not to be paid less than other apprentices. Along with other junior male workers, unindentured apprentices were to have the 'same rights' of representation as adult engineers, but shop stewards were excluded by the provision that junior male workers should in the first instance report a grievance to their foreman, and, if he failed to put the matter right, to the local trade union official. In addition, junior workers were not to be called out on strike over an issue concerning adult workers.

The account of negotiations on behalf of male engineering workers is now complete, but there were also women and girls employed in engineering. The 1931 census returned 293,000 females engaged in the metals-and-engineering group as a whole. Since relatively few women worked in shipbuilding or iron and steel, the majority of them must have been in engineering, where they were found to be particularly suited to lighter tasks in electrical engineering, 'but changed methods of

production, and the supply of mechanical aids' were 'continually extending the sphere of their work, and giving them access to sections of manufacturing previously closed against them'.<sup>15</sup> Although several other engineering unions had admitted small numbers of women into membership, the two general unions represented them in the negotiations with the employers' federation which settled their pay and conditions of work. Since the First World War their pay had been settled nationally, and there were no district rates for women, although their pay, like that of the men, was divided into a base rate from which piece-rates and other allowances were calculated, and a bonus which was varied from time to time. In 1934 the base rate for women of 21 years of age and over was 90p and the standard bonus was 60p (the A rate) with a minimum rate of 40p (the B rate). In federated firms some 80 per cent of women were employed on systems of payment by results.<sup>16</sup>

Following the agreement of May 1935 to increase adult male rates of pay by 10p a week in two stages, the general unions submitted a similar claim for women to the federation. The management board passed it on to its committee on the wages of female workers, whose proposal was an increase for time-workers only, of 5p for girls under 18, and of 10p for women of 18 and over. This, it calculated, would apply to only 3,900 out of 60,000 women in federated firms.<sup>17</sup> As might have been expected, the management board doubted whether this would satisfy the unions. It put out feelers, and at its meeting of 26 September learned that there was 'reason to believe' that a general increase of 5p a week to all women of 18 and over would be accepted by the unions. When it put the proposal to the local associations, a majority of them gave it their support, but less than the two-thirds majority for which the board was hoping. Coventry and Birmingham reported that women in the Midlands were enjoying high earnings through piece-work, and so their members were opposed to a general increase, but would support a 10p rise for time-workers only. In the end the president put the management board's proposal to the meeting of the general council on 4 December, where it was carried by 55 votes to 6.

The next claim for a pay increase for women came in September 1936. The employers' response was delayed by the same differences among the local associations as in 1935. The management board proposed an increase of 5p all round, but the Birmingham association wanted 10p for time-workers only. A ballot was held early in 1937 on whether to offer a general increase of 5p or 10p. The result was a

<sup>15</sup> Yates, 159.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

<sup>17</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (25 Sept. 1935).



majority of three to two for 5p. The management board doubted whether the unions would accept 5p, and decided that, if they refused it, the federation should suggest a joint subcommittee to review women's wages generally. If the unions rejected that, it would be up to them to take the next step. However, the unions undertook to put the offer to their members, who accepted it.

On 15 December 1937 the general unions met the employers again. They pointed out that since the beginning of 1935 the men's bonus had been increased by 40p a week whereas the increase for women had been 10p only. The following day the management board took the view that employment had passed its peak in 'the lighter sections of the Industry where the larger volume of female labour is employed'. In answer to a suggestion from the London association that women's rates be linked with the rates of adult men in line with the proposed agreement on apprentices' pay, the management board replied that women were different. They were not 'as a general rule' making a career in engineering, and they were 'concentrated in certain sections and districts' which had 'their own cycle of prosperity and depression'. At that time the management board was not ashamed to hold a sexist view on women's pay and employment.

On 27 January 1938 the employers' subcommittee recommended to the management board that the claim be rejected for the time being, and reviewed again in six months, but the board instructed it to approach the unions again 'on the basis of removing anomalies in the women's wage position'. In March the unions agreed to a joint committee for this purpose; but in June the board decided that the talks should go no further, even if their termination should lead to a new pay-claim from the unions. It had emerged that the main anomaly seemed to be the existence of the minimum (B) rate. This, the board thought, could be increased, or abandoned altogether 'so far as women timeworkers were concerned'. However, its main reason for ending the talks was current recession at the time. In February 1939 the aircraft manufacturers, who were still prospering, asked whether they were entitled to pay women above the A rate. The board's reply was that individuals could be paid more, but the A rate was the maximum for women as a class. In May the Coventry association, which had previously opposed general pay increases for women, asked whether there was any likelihood of the federation dealing with 'the issue on a national basis, as they were expecting a series of local applications'. There was, however, no need for the federation to act until the unions put in a claim. A claim was submitted in June. By then the men had received an increase of 50p in their bonus since 1935, whereas the women had had 10p only. That was still the position when war was declared.

Besides negotiations over pay and conditions of employment, there were discussions over the procedure for conducting those negotiations and for dealing with other questions which might be raised by either side. Whereas the Engineers normally took the lead in negotiations, except over women's claims,<sup>18</sup> they monopolized discussions over procedure. At the end of 1934 they balloted their members on whether to terminate or amend the existing procedure. The result was a two to one majority for amendment, and in May 1935 they presented their proposals for change to the employers. Their main objective was to get rid of the 'status quo' clause, which had been imposed on the unions after the 1922 lockout. This clause obliged workers to accept any change introduced by management, although they could pursue an objection to the change through procedure, in the hope that the management representatives at a local or central conference would overrule the firm concerned. The Engineers wanted to substitute the principle of 'mutuality', which prescribed that changes should be made by agreement only. They also objected to the federation's interpretation of the clause providing that, where a change would 'result in one class of workpeople being replaced by another in the establishment', the management should give ten days' notice before introducing the change. They held that the federation's reading of the clause was 'unduly restrictive'. They wanted to change the provision that trade union members 'may' have shop stewards by substituting 'shall', and, similarly, to make the setting-up of works committees compulsory. They wanted to drop the provision for selecting shop stewards to sit on these committees by ballot vote, which had 'not proved satisfactory'. Finally, they wanted trade union officers to have the right to raise a question with an employer, 'notwithstanding that the subject may not have been raised previously by the workpeople directly concerned'.

The federation's management board did not discuss its response until 28 November, although papers had been prepared for it in the mean time. It first debated whether it should bring the other unions that were party to the procedure into the discussions, and decided not to do so, otherwise it 'might give the impression that they were prepared to depart in some way from the existing procedure'. It then decided to reject all but two of the Engineers' points out of hand. To give way on 'status quo'

<sup>18</sup> By this time both general unions had recruited numbers of women members. In 1932 the General and Municipal Workers, in trying to settle a dispute over women's pay at a factory in Atherton in Lancashire, discovered that the engineering procedure for settling disputes did not apply to women. Together with the Transport and General Workers, they asked the employers to put this right; and the employers agreed that the procedure for men, the York Memorandum, should apply also to women workers. (H. A. Clegg, *General Union* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), 224-5).

would 'seriously affect the employers' rights'; on the question of whether there should be shop stewards in the plant, 'the responsibility must be theirs'; it rejected the proposal that it should 'force' its members to accept works committees; and a ballot vote for choosing shop stewards to serve on these committees should be retained because it 'might, in certain circumstances, be a protection for the milder type of Trade Union member'. However, on the replacement of one class of workpeople by another, it was prepared to offer a form of words to assure the union that it did not intend 'taking work from skilled men to give to semi-skilled men operating a different type of machine'. As for a direct approach from a union official to management over an issue not raised by his employees, the board was impressed by a practice which, it was told, had developed on the north-east coast. There the union official, 'when he becomes aware that trouble is brewing in the works of a federated member, calls on the Association Secretary and discusses the matters informally with him. This enables the Association Officials to get in touch with the firm concerned, and possibly settle the matter before it is raised officially under the Provisions for Avoiding Disputes.' As a result of this practice, it was reported, of the 725 questions that had been raised 'either at interviews with Union delegates at the Association offices, or at Works Conferences' since the 1922 agreement was signed, 'only 75 reached the Local Conference stage, and of these 75, only 41 went to Central Conference'.

On 5 December the federation representatives presented their response to the union executive, when, as they reported to the management board on 19 December,

the main point emerging was that the Union Executive seemed less disposed than formerly to insist on a revision of the terms of the Agreement . . . and showed an inclination to proceed on the basis previously suggested by the Employers, namely, by way of interpretation of certain of the clauses.

The Chairman stated that the atmosphere throughout the Conference was of a friendly nature.

At a further conference on 5 May 1936 the union executive told the employers' representatives that they were 'profoundly dissatisfied', but would report back the assurances they had been given and the new interpretation concerning the replacement of one class of workpeople by another.

The relationship between the Engineers' officials and committees and those of the employers' federation deserves further examination. There can be little doubt that the employers' representatives considered the leaders of the Amalgamated Engineering Union as their 'opposite numbers'. The management board saw nothing amiss in discussing



revision of its procedure agreement with the Engineers alone, although twenty-six other unions were parties to it. On 27 October 1938 the board discussed a request for a conference on procedure from the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, to which all these other unions except the Foundry Workers were affiliated, and replied that, although it recognized the individual unions concerned, and was prepared to meet them jointly if that was desired, it did not recognize the confederation as their collective representative.

The relationship between the Engineers and the federation can also be discerned in several of the industrial disputes of the period. In October 1934 the union was in dispute with a Luton firm, the Adamant Engineering Company, which made steering gear for cars. It threatened to instruct its members at car-assembly plants, some of which were federated, to refuse to handle material from Adamant. The officers of the federation met members of the Engineers' executive when 'the Union representatives appreciated the necessity of regarding the proceedings as strictly confidential and the discussion throughout was of an amicable nature'. The executive members agreed to take no action, 'pending the outcome of approaches to Adamant by federated customers'. These approaches appear to have settled the dispute, for on 19 December the management board was told that, if a similar situation arose in the future, representatives of the union executive would 'call at Broadway House [the federation's headquarters] and discuss the position with representatives of the Federation as parties mutually interested, before they take any action against Federated Firms'.

Another dispute in 1937 provided a sterner test of the goodwill between the leaders of the two organizations. The district committee of the union at Barrow had been seeking a closed shop at Vickers' works there through the disputes procedure. Since the policy of the federation had consistently been opposed to compelling employees to join trade unions—whatever might be the accepted practice on the shop-floor—it was no surprise that the claim was finally rejected when it came before a central conference in August 1936. In September a mass meeting of union members at Barrow decided to give their colleagues who were not members two weeks to join. At the end of that period they proposed to institute an overtime ban at Vickers which, given the demand for armaments then, would hit the company hard. The federation complained to the executive council of the union whose secretary wrote to the district committee to tell it that the ban would be a violation of the overtime agreement which stated that 'the Employers have the right to decide when overtime is necessary'. Although the workers could bring forward any objections they might have through the procedure, they must work the overtime required of them in the mean time.

The ban was nevertheless enforced on 9 October. Following further exchanges of letters, the union's president, Jack Little, went to Barrow on 26 November with another member of the executive to instruct the district committee to terminate the embargo. On 29 November another mass meeting resolved to maintain it, and on 4 December the district committee wrote to the executive to say that it would lift the embargo if the executive would arrange for a conference with the employers to discuss the issue 'immediately'. The executive replied with a telegram insisting on an unconditional lifting of the ban. The district committee replied that it would have to call a mass meeting to vote on it. On 17 December the employers' management board decided to inform the union 'that the time has now come when the Executive Council should take all available action to bring the existing situation to an end'. At the beginning of the new year the executive council suspended the district committee. On 14 January 1937 it learned that another mass meeting of its members at Vickers had voted to maintain the embargo and demanded the reinstatement of their district committee. However, a week later it was reported that over 400 men had been working overtime on the Sunday following the mass meeting. The executive agreed to send a declaration to Barrow to be signed by nominees for election to the new district committee. Members of the suspended committee who signed it were to be reinstated without standing for election.

The goodwill entertained by the members of the management board for the Engineers' leaders did not extend to the union's legislative body, the national committee. On 29 June 1939 the board noted that it might 'find it necessary to consider seriously the Federation's position in relation to negotiation with the A.E.U. because it had been ascertained that the National Committee which dominates the Executive Council and consists of workmen from the shops, is at the present time composed of members the majority of whom are not employed in federated shops'. However, the sentiments of the board towards the national committee did not necessarily divide the board from the members of the union executive, for the feelings of the latter towards the national committee were not always friendly. Amicable relations between the leaders of the federation and of the unions had been greatly facilitated in 1934 by the resignation of Sir Allan Smith from his posts in the federation. This 'dour, abstemious, indefatigable and supremely efficient' Scot had dominated the federation from his combined positions as chief executive and chairman of the management board. By 1934 his 'domineering behaviour and conduct of affairs was causing increasing resentment', and he was also ill. Henceforth the management board was chaired by an employer, and a new office of director was created, to which Alexander Ramsay was appointed, who was 'formal



but conciliatory in manner, ready to listen to other people's points of view'. The unions had found Smith unsympathetic, and they regarded him as the author of their defeat in 1922.<sup>19</sup>

### *Shipbuilding and Steel*

Shipbuilding and steel are the two major remaining components of the metals-and-engineering group of industries. Industrial relations in shipbuilding had a great deal in common with those in engineering. With few exceptions, the same group of unions met the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation, which was an organization of much the same structure and constitution as the Engineering and Allied Employers' National Federation. The main differences on the union side were that the Engineers played a much smaller part in shipbuilding than in engineering, and, because of that, the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions—to which the Engineers were not affiliated—was of considerably greater importance in shipbuilding than in engineering. The lead among shipbuilding unions was taken by the United Society of Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders; and the Shipconstructors' and Shipwrights' Association, which did not operate in engineering before the mid-1930s when some of its members were employed in aircraft construction, carried some weight in the shipbuilding industry.

Another contrast between the two industries is that the shipbuilding industry suffered a far worse decline than did engineering during the depression years. The general decline in world trade, which determines the demand for shipping, exceeded the decline in domestic production, and 'since the volume of new mercantile tonnage produced each year represents only a small percentage of the tonnage in existence, ship construction tends to fluctuate far more than in proportion to world trade'.<sup>20</sup> In 1932 the rate of unemployment in shipbuilding was 62.2 per cent, whereas the figure for motor vehicles was 20.0 per cent, and for electrical engineering 16.3 per cent. Attempts were made to offset the effects of the decline in world trade by the industry itself (National Shipbuilders Security Limited was formed in 1933 to buy up and dismantle obsolete shipyards) and by the government (the British Shipping (Assistance) Act 1935 was intended to encourage shipping companies to 'scrap and build'). Nevertheless the major impetus to recovery came from the rearmament programme.

Even a depression such as this could not destroy the combative spirit

<sup>19</sup> Wigham, 77, 137, 138.

<sup>20</sup> Leslie Jones, *Shipbuilding in Britain, Mainly between the Two World Wars* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1957), 32.

of the Boilermakers. In 1931 their London members had stood firm for seventeen weeks when the River Thames Ship Repairers' Association had locked them out in order to impose a wage cut. In the summer of 1934 the association proposed further cuts, but withdrew them after another lockout which lasted for seven weeks. In 1933 the Boilermakers' district committee on the Mersey refused to join with the other shipbuilding unions in signing an adverse revision of their overtime and night-shift conditions, and, when the employers imposed the new terms on their members, ordered a ban on overtime and night-shift work. When the shipbuilding employers threatened to impose a national lockout unless the embargo was withdrawn, the Boilermakers' executive council negotiated an improvement in the reduced night-shift rate which had been accepted by the other unions before they would agree to instruct their Mersey district to lift their embargo. Even then its members were to work overtime only 'when it is found to be the only practical method of completing the job' and the district full-time union official was to advise them on that point.<sup>21</sup>

Because the Depression hit shipbuilding harder than engineering, wage increases in shipbuilding began at a later stage of the recovery than in engineering. In 1935 engineering workers received an increase of 5p in their weekly rate in May and another in July. The first wage increase for shipbuilding workers was agreed in January 1936, of 10p for time-workers, as a 'bonus'. Since piece-workers in shipbuilding, unlike engineering piece-workers, did not receive part of their pay as a time-rate added to their piece-work earnings, the agreement also provided for a 4 per cent increase in piece-rates, which was considered to be an equivalent improvement in pay. In that year engineering workers moved further ahead, with a total increase of 15p a week. In 1937, when the engineering wage increase again totalled 15p, shipbuilding began to catch up with 20p for time-workers and 8 per cent on piece-rates. By the end of 1939 shipyard workers had caught up with their engineering colleagues, having secured increases of 10p a week, and 4 per cent on piece-rates, in both 1938 and 1939, compared to a single increase of 10p a week for engineering workers in 1939.

The major change in the method of building ships in this period was the introduction of electric welding. This affected particularly the work of drillers, a trade organized by the Shipwrights, and of riveters, who were members of the Boilermakers' Society. Both unions took the view that work that was henceforth to be welded 'should be done by the class hitherto doing the work', and should be paid at the same rate as before.

<sup>21</sup> James E. Mortimer, *The History of the Boilermakers' Society* (2 vols.; London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), ii. 249.

The employers took the view that a new class of workman was required, who was specially trained for the job. The union view on this point was that if special training was needed, it could be included in existing apprenticeship courses.<sup>22</sup> In April 1934 the shipbuilding employers announced the inauguration of a new grade of welder, rated at £3 a week, a little below the rates of nearly all the existing skilled grades. Given the propensity of the shipbuilding unions to strike against any threat to their interests, and the fact that the only two significant strikes in the next five years that appear to have any relevance to welding were demarcation disputes between the Boilermakers and the Shipwrights, it seems reasonable to conclude that the new grade was not widely used, and that the employers accepted the view that welding should be carried out by the men who had performed the work before electric welding was introduced, leaving it to the two unions to settle which welders did the job of the driller and which the job of the riveter. Eventually the two unions agreed on a 50 : 50 division of all structural welding.

The pattern of industrial relations in the iron-and-steel industry was very different from that of engineering and shipbuilding. There was, admittedly, a single employers' organization, the Iron and Steel Trades Employers' Association, but the production workers were not organized on the basis of a strict division between craftsmen and apprentices on the one hand, and labourers and semi-skilled workers on the other. They were organized in teams, in which men started as labourers and were promoted by seniority through the various jobs in their teams up to 'first hand'. There were three unions for these production workers: the Blastfurnacemen, Ore Miners, Coke Workers and Kindred Trades, which catered for workers producing iron; the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, which catered for workers producing steel; and the Transport and General Workers who catered, along with the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, for workers producing tin-plate. There were also bricklayers who relined the furnaces, and engineering craftsmen who maintained the machinery of the steel works. The former belonged to the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers and the latter to the appropriate engineering unions, and both groups were regarded as being far removed from the production workers, by both the employers and the production workers themselves. The rates of pay of production workers were tonnage rates, so that their earnings fluctuated with output, but the tonnage rates themselves rose and fell according to a selling-price sliding scale, so that earnings also followed the prices of steel products. In 1923 the Building Trade Workers had signed an agreement which related their pay to prices and output.

<sup>22</sup> David Dougan, *The Shipwrights* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Frank Graham, 1975), 247.

In 1932, following a recommendation of the Import Duties Advisory Committee, the government had imposed stiff tariffs on steel imports on condition that the industry reorganize itself to produce steel more efficiently. By 1934 the steel firms had, rather reluctantly, created the British Iron and Steel Federation to supervise reorganization as the condition for the renewal of the tariffs. The federation took over the price-fixing functions previously exercised by sectional associations in the different branches of the industry, and also negotiated with steel cartels abroad over quantitative restrictions on their exports to Britain, after having been granted a temporary increase in the tariff from 33½ per cent to 50 per cent for the purpose. The successive increases in the earnings of steel workers up to the war were therefore due as much to the impact of the federation on prices as to the general recovery from the Depression and the rearmament boom, which together led to an increase of 150 per cent in the output of steel between 1931 and 1939.

There was, however, an instance of a wage reduction in this period, which arose out of an incident most uncharacteristic of the union concerned—the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. The employers in the South Wales steel industry wanted the first shift of the week to start work earlier, at 10 p.m. on Sunday in the melting shops and at midnight in the mills. After this proposal had been approved in a ballot, the union agreed that it should be accepted in return for an increase in pay. Some of the men, however, refused to work to the new agreement, and the employers told the union that unless the new times were universally adopted by the end of the year they would regard the agreement as null and void. They should, said Sir Arthur Pugh, then general secretary of the union, have given effect to it wherever the men were willing, and left the union to deal with the remainder. Instead they withdrew the pay increases and reverted to the previous starting times. The union executive directed the attention of its members to ‘the disastrous effect that their action must have on the principle of collective bargaining’, and demanded ‘adequate assurances . . . before any further negotiations’. ‘There is’, said Pugh, ‘no record of any such assurance being given’.<sup>23</sup>

The most serious rebuff the union leaders received from their members, however, was over a superannuation scheme in the tin-plate trade in South Wales. The proposed benefits were: £1 a week pension for the retired worker, or 75p with 37½p for his widow in the event of his death. Should the worker die before retirement, there would be £25 for burial expenses, and £1.50 a week for his dependants, if any. The scheme was to be financed by a levy on all tin-plate produced by the

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Pugh, *Men of Steel* (London: Iron and Steel Trades' Confederation, 1951), 536–7.



employers and a deduction of 2½ per cent from the wages of the men, both estimated to yield £25,000 a year. Contributions were to be deducted from September 1935. In 1936 the divisional officer of the confederation reported

an organised opposition among our Llanelly branches.

The method adopted is to issue forms, and most of our members connected with some of the branches have appended their signatures requesting the return of their contributions . . . and the discontinuance of further deductions. Failing compliance with these demands by the employers a twenty-eight days' notice to cease work is threatened.<sup>24</sup>

A meeting was arranged for 19 July 1936 to which delegates were to come with mandates from their branches. A majority voted against the scheme, and the confederation gave notice to terminate it. But there was still the Transport and General Workers. In his report for the third quarter of the year their general secretary, Ernest Bevin, wrote: 'I do not want to lose the 1d. per box they [the employers] have agreed to pay'. He was also determined to look after 'the old men who have been forced out of the industry seven or eight years ago, who have now reached the age of 65 and are on the State pension or Poor Law . . . who had been looking forward to their £1 a week'. He therefore intended to proceed without the confederation. However, at the end of 1937 he was forced to admit that 'we failed to secure the required number of signatures for the inauguration of the scheme, and it must therefore be regarded as dead'.<sup>25</sup>

In the heavy steel trade the employers and the unions conducted their business with each other at conferences arranged for the particular purpose, as was the practice in engineering and shipbuilding. Tin-plate had a standing joint industrial council with regular meetings. There were also a number of joint committees and joint boards covering particular areas of the country, most of them dealing with the production of iron, in which the Blastfurnacemen were the major or only union, such as the Lincolnshire Ironmasters', Iron Ore Getters' and Ironworkers' Joint Committee. In two of them, one for the north-east coast and one for South Yorkshire, the Iron and Steel Trades Employers' Association dealt with a number of engineering unions representing maintenance workers. The union side of the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board was supplied by the confederation, and the employers' side was unusual in consisting of individual employers, there being no association. Pugh reported two disputes in this period in which the

<sup>24</sup> Pugh, *Man of Steel*, 511, 513; see also pp. 517, 518.

<sup>25</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *General Secretary's Fourth Quarterly Report* (1937).



board's disputes subcommittee found in favour of the men but the firms concerned refused to accept their findings. The union executive criticized the lack of discipline on the part of the employers, but in Pugh's view an 'even more unsatisfactory feature' was 'the lack of any trade union spirit amongst the majority of the men employed in the iron trade in that part of the country', which meant that the union was unable to force the errant firms to comply with the subcommittee's decisions.<sup>26</sup> Another lesson was the benefit of organization among employers for the conduct of industrial relations. Had the firms belonged to the Iron and Steel Trades Employers' Association, they would have complied with the findings—with alacrity.

### *Coalmining*

Since the defeat of the Miners' Federation in the 1921 lockout, coalminers' pay had been related to profit. The first charge on 'ascertained' proceeds, after other costs had been deducted, was standard rates of pay. These were 1914 or 1915 rates for surface workers, haulage workers, maintenance workers, and supervisors, and 1914 or 1915 piece-work standards for face-workers—both together with some subsequent additions—plus an agreed minimum percentage addition; then came standard profits, also agreed; finally, any remainder was divided between wages and profits in agreed proportions. The ascertainment was made district by district, but the formula for the division of the proceeds had been set out in a national agreement until the end of the 1926–7 lockout when the coalowners insisted on district agreements. These agreements were revised in 1931 following the Coal Mines Act of that year, pushed through by the second Labour government, to give the miners a 7½-hour working day (although this could be calculated on a fortnightly basis with up to eight hours worked on any one day); but the consequential wage reductions 'were small and confined to a minority of districts'.<sup>27</sup> As by 1929 miners' pay had already fallen in every district to the minimum percentages set out in their agreements, miners working full-time suffered only a marginal reduction in pay, if any, during the Depression, whose adverse consequence for the mining communities was unemployment, which rose to 33.9 per cent for their industry in 1932, and short-time working, which was widespread in the worst-hit coalfields. One of these was South Wales and Monmouthshire (to give the district its full title), where the workforce fell from over 250,000 in 1924 to under 140,000 in 1934. The South Wales owners had proposed a wage reduction, to operate when

<sup>26</sup> Pugh, 506–7.

<sup>27</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 526.

the statutory 7½-hour working day came into force, and the South Wales Miners' Federation had decided to allow its existing agreement to lapse on 1 January 1931 when it called all the members out on strike. Two weeks later an agreement was made, with the help of the government, to maintain the existing rates of pay for the 7½-hour working day, but to put the minimum percentage addition, and the subsistence wage—intended as a rock-bottom minimum rate for the lower-paid—to arbitration by the new chairman of the district conciliation board, a lawyer called F. P. M. Schiller. He awarded a reduction from 28 per cent to 20 per cent in the minimum percentage addition and replaced the existing subsistence wage of 38¾ a shift by three different rates of 37½p for a married man with children, 36¼p for a married man without children, and 35p for a single man.

The union and its members were in no condition to sustain another strike. Despite the storm of protest from the miners who had believed that their pay was already so low that no independent arbitrator could award further cuts, their executive persuaded a delegate conference to accept the award by a narrow margin of votes. For three years the owners refused to agree to a further adjustment of wages, but when the union gave notice to terminate the agreement in 1934, the owners consented to the unions putting their case to a special tribunal set up by the Ministry of Labour. On this occasion the chairman was Lord Bridgeman, who had been Secretary for Mines at the Board of Trade from 1920 to 1922. The award was for an increase of 2½ per cent in the minimum percentage addition, and the three subsistence rates were replaced by a single rate of 38⅓p. The report was published at the end of October. Its award was the first increase in wages for South Wales miners since 1924. Elsewhere rising coal prices brought a small pay increase under the ascertainment system in Warwickshire, and increases were negotiated for surface workers in Scotland, for boys aged 14-16 in North Staffordshire, and in subsistence allowances in Cumberland.

In 1935 the ascertainments brought pay increases in Warwickshire again, and in South Derbyshire; and Durham, which was now the lowest paid of all the major districts, began negotiations on a new agreement. These talks, however, were overtaken by a national claim launched by the Miners' Federation. Evidence of economic recovery encouraged the districts to submit resolutions to federation conferences for a return to national bargaining. The 1934 conference had proposed that 'a national minimum wage be fixed at 20 per cent above the present average rate'; and the national executive submitted a resolution to a special conference in February 1935 instructing it to approach the coalowners to ask them 'to devise with the Federation suitable wages machinery providing for an improved standard of life for the mine workers'; and, if that failed, to ask

the government to intervene. Neither the owners nor the government responded favourably, and the annual Miners' conference in July approved its executive's recommendations for 'a flat rate advance of 10p per day' and that 'following an intensive campaign in support of this claim a Special Conference be convened to decide what action should be taken to enforce the demand'.

Following further rebuffs from the owners and the government, the executive organized a propaganda campaign for 'the Miners' Two Bob'<sup>28</sup> with the circulation of its case to Members of Parliament, meetings and posters, and successive issues of the *Miners' Campaign Special*. The special conference to decide on action met on 17 October. The executive proposal was for 'a Ballot Vote . . . of the men in the coalfields to enforce the claim for a flat rate advance in wages', and for authority to negotiate 'in the meantime'. The speeches in the debate and the vote showed a good deal of apprehension among the leaders in some districts, but the resolution was carried by 320 votes to 172. Yorkshire and South Wales supplied most of the votes in favour of a ballot, and Durham most of those against.

However, the decision brought immediate results in a flurry of meetings in which Captain Crookshank, now the Secretary for Mines, talked separately with the Miners' executive and the Mining Association of Great Britain. The government's proposal, which it 'had repeatedly pressed on the coal-owners' was 'that only by a reorganisation of the selling side could a reasonable price be obtained by the sale of coal and the industry put on such a financial basis as would permit better wages to be paid';<sup>29</sup> but it still had no suggestions for immediate action to help the miners, and the owners maintained their refusal to discuss wages nationally. There was nothing for it but to go ahead with the ballot. Voting took place between 11 and 13 November 1935, immediately before the general election which returned the 'National' government with a reduced majority. The miners themselves showed more confidence than their conference delegates had done. They voted by 409,351 to 29,215 in favour of pressing their claim 'even to the extent of tendering . . . notice to enforce the claim if necessary'. Even the Durham vote was ten to one in favour, and the ballot at last brought a response from the owners.

On 17 December a small group of owners met representatives of the federation to tell them that, as a result of the Miners' campaign, some large customers might be willing to pay more for their coal, and the owners 'were trying to get a revision of their current contracts on the

<sup>28</sup> 2 shillings, or 10p.

<sup>29</sup> R. Page Arnot, *The Miners in Crisis and War* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1961), 157.

basis of higher prices so that better wages could be paid'. They were therefore able to promise that 'a definite increase in wages should be paid in each District' from 1 January 1936.<sup>30</sup> As the Mining Association was still not empowered to negotiate on wages, the amounts would have to be settled with the district associations of coalowners. The strategy of the federation executive was yielding results. Led by ICI, a large number of companies, including gas and electricity undertakings, followed by retail coal merchants and co-operative societies, had told the Mines Department that they were willing to accept an increase of 10p a ton in the price of coal, so long as the proceeds were used to increase miners' pay. However, the owners' promise, without definite figures for wage increases, was not enough to persuade the Miners' executive to call off the strike, and on 18 December a further special conference approved, by 478 votes to 28, its recommendation that 'the suggestions so far made' were 'entirely unsatisfactory' and that strike notices should be handed in 'unless wage proposals satisfactory to the Executive Committee are obtained in the meantime'. Because the period of notice required was a week in some districts and a fortnight in others, the dates for tendering notices were 13 or 20 January, all to operate on 27 January.

On 8 January the executive received a list of the pay increases that the coalowners' district associations were proposing. For some districts, including Lancashire and the Midlands counties (except North Derbyshire), the figure was 5p a shift for adult miners;<sup>31</sup> for Yorkshire, Scotland, and the Forest of Dean it was 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>p a shift; for Somerset it varied from 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p to 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p; for Durham, Northumberland, and Cumberland it was 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p; and for Kent it was 2p. South Wales was offered a 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> per cent increase in its minimum percentage addition, and an increase of 2p a shift in the subsistence wage. The executive tried its best to persuade the owners to find some way to make a uniform offer, or to increase the figures. On 9 January it postponed the handing-in of notices, and on 23 January the owners informed it that Yorkshire was now prepared to go up to 5p a shift, and North Derbyshire would be included in the list at 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>p a shift, but that the main exporting districts, including South Wales, Durham, and Northumberland, were unable to improve their offers. It was, however, willing to make a concession on the issue of national negotiations. It was 'prepared to co-operate with the Mineworkers' Federation in setting up a Joint Standing Consultation Committee for the consideration of all questions of common interest and of general application to the industry, not excluding general principles applicable to the determination of wages by district agree-

<sup>30</sup> Arnot, *The Miners in Crisis and War*, 169.

<sup>31</sup> The Nottinghamshire employers did not deal with the Miners' Federation, but they offered an increase of 5p a shift to the Nottinghamshire Miners' Industrial Union.



ments'. The union executive accepted this offer, giving as its reason for calling off the strike the fact that in these circumstances a stoppage would have destroyed the unity of the Miners' Federation, and in 1937 the ascertainment system took over as the agent of wage increases.

Coal prices were rising fast. Every issue of the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* carried reports of wage increases in several districts in the previous month. In June only three districts had none, and in November only one. The net increases for the whole industry amounted to the equivalent of an increase of 20p a week for each working miner in the country, but in 1938 the increase in prices came almost to a halt. There were some advances in wages and some decreases, adding up to a small net advance overall, and the outcome for the first eight months of 1939 was much the same. The federation launched no wage campaigns during those years. Conference resolutions for such a campaign were set aside in favour of approaches to the government and the employers for a reduction in working hours, which was not achieved. However, several districts were able to persuade their employers' associations to revise their district wage agreements in favour of the miners. These included two of the largest districts, South Wales and Durham, both of which negotiated new agreements in 1937 revising the basic rates on which the calculation of wages rested, by substituting higher figures. In addition the South Wales agreement raised their minimum percentage addition, and the Durham agreement cut the working hours of surface workers from forty-nine to forty-eight a week.

Two other issues that occupied the attention of the Miners' Federation and its constituents during this period were 'non-political unionism' (which is dealt with in Chapter 2), and the explosion at the Gresford pit in Denbighshire, North Wales, on 22 September 1934, in which 265 men and boys were killed. Stafford Cripps represented the men at the subsequent inquiry where his cross-examination revealed many breaches of safety regulations and shortcomings in the work of the Mines Inspectorate. The report of the inquiry was debated in the House of Commons on 23 February 1934 when it was resolved that 'grave responsibility rests upon the country and Parliament to prevent such disasters by adopting immediate and effective measures for ensuring that the industry is carried on under conditions of maximum safety'.

### *Textiles and Clothing*

Like the coalmining industry, the cotton industry had been one of the motors of the industrial revolution but was now in decline, although it remained one of the country's major industries. Its three main sections were preparation of the yarn, spinning, and weaving. Spinning was

subdivided into mule-spinning and ring-spinning, according to the machinery employed. Ring-spinning was gradually overtaking mule-spinning, although the mule still produced the finest cotton yarn. In weaving the automatic loom was slowly replacing the standard Lancashire loom. There were also three unions, which called themselves 'amalgamations' although they were really federations of local associations. The Amalgamated Association of Cotton Spinners organized the all-male teams of mule-spinners: the spinner, the 'big piecer', and the 'little piecer', who formed a promotion line akin to those in the steel industry. The spinners received the lion's share of the earnings of their teams, and controlled the affairs of their union. The Amalgamated Association of Card Blowing and Ring Room Operatives (the Cardroom Amalgamation) organized the women ring-spinners and the workers in the preparatory stage, among whom the male strippers and grinders had the highest status and formed an élite in the union. The Amalgamated Weavers' Association organized both male and female weavers who did the same job and were paid according to the same piece-price list. Theirs was the most democratic of the three unions. The mule-spinners and ring-spinners were also paid by the piece. The price-lists for all three occupations were elaborate documents, negotiated so far as both groups of spinners were concerned with the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners' Associations, which also dealt with the Cardroom Amalgamation. Despite its title, the Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Association was concerned almost entirely with weaving, and negotiated with the Weavers' Amalgamation. The finishing stages of production—bleaching and dyeing—were regarded as being another industry.

Cotton suffered more badly than most industries during the 1929-33 Depression. The wage cuts of the operatives were harsher than those in any other industry except wool. In 1932 two strikes, one in spinning and the other in weaving, accounted for 5.3 million out of 6.5 million working days lost in all recorded strikes in the country. The weaving strike was settled by the intervention of F. W. Leggett, of the Ministry of Labour, who was beginning to make a name for himself as a conciliator, in a series of discussions at the Midland Hotel in Manchester. Among other matters, the parties agreed on a new procedure for handling their differences, including reference to a conciliation committee with an independent chairman and two other members from outside the industry, one to be nominated by each side. At the end of their strike, the two sides of the spinning and preparatory sections agreed on a similar procedure to that set out in what became known as the 'Midland Agreement'.

However, by the beginning of 1933 there was a stream of complaints

from the Weavers' district associations that employers were contravening the detailed terms of the Midland Agreement—'working at cut rates, exceeding the forty-eight hour week, and working more than four looms outside the terms of the new agreement',<sup>32</sup> which had included provisions for payment of weavers operating more than the previous standard of four Lancashire looms.

The average size of weaving firms was much less than that of spinning mills. They had smaller resources and were more difficult to control. Too impoverished to strike against every infringement of the agreement, the Weavers concluded that their only remedy was for parliament to make it illegal for an employer to pay less than the agreed rate.<sup>33</sup>

They therefore approached Leggett, who concluded that they were right. The only way to avoid the collapse of the agreement he had helped them to negotiate was to enforce it by statute. After establishing that the Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Association was also in favour of the proposal, Leggett persuaded his minister, Sir Henry Betterton, to put it to the Cabinet. Together, they 'piloted the Cotton Act through the Cabinet against the determined resistance of the Board of Trade'.<sup>34</sup> It became the Cotton Manufacturing (Temporary Provisions) Act 1934. Lowe describes it as a 'potentially revolutionary development'. Not only was it an unusual use of the authority of parliament in peacetime but, although initially set to last for a year, 'it could be extended within and beyond the cotton industry'.<sup>35</sup> In fact it continued in force in the weaving section until after the war, but was not extended to any other industry.

All sections of the industry secured wage advances in 1936. In that year the Spinners and the Cardroom Amalgamation terminated its 1932 conciliation agreement, which 'had only dealt with union disputes all of which the Cardroom lost'.<sup>36</sup> In the same year the two unions submitted a wage-claim to the employers, and 'were able to win an advance on the list [which yielded a 5.63 per cent on current rates] largely because the cotton trade was beginning to improve and the threat of strike action persuaded the employers to restore at least part of the wage cut'.<sup>37</sup> The Weavers, however, had a greater regard for their 1932 Midland Agreement procedure to which they submitted their claim when it was rejected by the employers. Charles Doughty was in the chair; a lawyer had been nominated by the employers, and R. H. Tawney by the union.

<sup>32</sup> Clegg, *History*, 522.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 517.

<sup>34</sup> Rodney Lowe, *Adjusting to Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 118.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 116, 118.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Bullen and Alan Fowler, *The Cardroom Workers' Union* (Manchester: Amalgamated Textile Union, 1986), 146.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

The union submitted the results of its recent wage census which showed average earnings of £1.57 a week, so, it argued, the existing list failed 'to give what could be described modestly as a living wage'. The outcome was an agreement for an increase on list prices equivalent to 6.38 per cent on current rates.

Mule-spinning had always produced fine thread beyond the capacity of the ring spindles to match, but improvements in the ring frames continued to be made, and the difference in the quality of thread produced by the two processes continued to diminish, whereas technical advance in the mules had come to an end. Consequently the advantage of the more costly mule process was being eroded, and ring-spinning took an ever-increasing share of the market. It was gradually becoming evident that the mule-spinning branch of the industry was a dying trade; but there was nothing the Spinners' Amalgamation could do about it. The practice began to develop of two mule-spinners protecting their jobs by working as a team, thus cutting out both piecers. The unions opposed the Cotton Spinning Act of 1936 which provided grants for spinning firms that scrapped excess spindles. Their main objection was that the Act provided no compensation for the consequential loss of jobs by employees. However, they gave their support to another bill intended to restrict production which included payments for redundant operatives and provided a Cotton Board with union representatives to supervise the scheme. This became the Cotton Industry Act 1939, but was not implemented because of the war.

The cotton industry was by far the largest of the textile trades, with about 450,000 employees at the outbreak of the war. Wool and worsted came second, with about 240,000 employees. In the Depression the wool and worsted industry, like cotton-weaving, suffered from breaches of agreements by employers. In July 1936 the federation of wool and worsted unions, the National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades, passed a resolution stating

that the voluntary agreement on the limitation of overtime had entirely failed to achieve its object, and calling on the Government to take legislative action to limit the hours of women and young persons to 48 per week, and to make regulations, after consultation with the employers and trade unions, for the limitation of overtime working by adult males.<sup>38</sup>

The unions also wanted an inquiry into the worsted-spinning section of the industry with a view to establishing a statutory trade board to impose regulations governing wages and conditions in that section. In

<sup>38</sup> *Report of a Board of Inquiry into the Wages and Hours of Work in the Wool Textile Industry in Yorkshire* (1936), 10.



December 1935 the national association had submitted a general wage claim to the Wool (and Allied) Textile Employers' Council. A joint subcommittee discussed the claim during the early months of 1936, but in April the employers said that they were not prepared to grant a general increase, and the national association authorized the individual unions 'to take whatever steps may be necessary to secure a wage increase for their members'.<sup>39</sup> The main individual union in wool and worsted, the General Union of Textile Workers, had recently amalgamated with the three main unions in textile-finishing to form the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, and it was this new union that proceeded to submit wage-claims to a number of firms in Leeds. In August the employers' council asked the Minister of Labour to set up a court of inquiry to report on the 'matters in dispute . . . in view of the local disputes expected to follow from the action of the Union at Leeds'.<sup>40</sup> It stated that 'on the basis of such a report the parties would probably be able to reach a settlement by agreement'.<sup>41</sup>

The minister was not prepared to set up a court of inquiry under the Industrial Courts Act, but he was willing to set up a board of inquiry (perhaps a somewhat less formal and imposing body than a court of inquiry), which reported at the end of the year. The board held that

No useful purpose would be served by our trying to apportion responsibility for the breakdown of effective negotiations between the two sides. It must be admitted, however, that to a large extent they *have* broken down. At the same time, the industry has a very good record for the peaceful and sensible settling of its differences, and there appears to be on both sides a genuine wish to come once more into regular and friendly consultation in the interests of the whole trade.<sup>42</sup>

As for the wage-claim: 'Much of the argument on both sides turns on the present position of the industry as compared with 1930, when the Macmillan cut of 9.249 per cent became operative, and with 1931, when the additional cut of 11.7 per cent became operative.'<sup>43</sup> Consequently the board consulted accountants, who told it that there had been 'on the whole a progressive rise in profits' since then.<sup>44</sup> They believed there was 'some force' in the complaint that agreed rates, and especially agreed overtime rates, were not being paid.

As for the proposal for a trade board for worsted-spinning, it thought that this was technically feasible, because, even in factories that combined spinning and weaving, 'the individual workers will not be

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Oct. 1936), 358.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 17. (For 'the Macmillan cut' see Clegg, *History*, ii. 491.)

<sup>44</sup> *Wool Textile Industry*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>42</sup> *Wool Textile Industry*, 10.

working at both'; and it did 'not think the employers need be afraid of a Trade Board' because 'few employers in Trade Board trades would willingly now dispense with their Trade Boards'. Nevertheless it did not propose an immediate application of the Acts, because, even in this section of the industry, it found 'potentialities for the establishment of collective bargaining on a secure foundation'.<sup>45</sup> Above all it hoped to see the re-establishment of

the Northern Counties District Joint Industrial Council, which for several years did excellent work but has now practically lapsed . . . The rules of the National Council, of which this District Council formed part, included carefully conceived machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes, the revival of which would undoubtedly be of great service to the industry.<sup>46</sup>

Following the publication of the report, wage increases were negotiated for all sections of the industry, amounting 'in most instances, to 10 per cent';<sup>47</sup> and the joint industrial council was re-established.

With a labour force of about 130,000, hosiery ranked next to wool and worsted among the textile trades. Although hosiery firms were to be found in many parts of the country, trade union strength was concentrated in five district unions in the Midlands, at Hinckley, Ilkeston, Leicester, Loughborough, and Nottingham. The two main centres were Leicester and Hinckley, although trade-unionists in Hinckley were divided between the Hosiery Union, the Warehousemen's Association, and the Menders' Association. The unions dealt with the National Hosiery Manufacturers' Federation through a joint industrial council. Although there had been no breakdown of effective negotiations as in the woollen and worsted industry, the hosiery unions had their problem of widespread failure to observe the agreement in relation to overtime.

In 1938 the employers' federation circulated its members to discover the extent to which they were observing the agreement. Only fifty-eight out of 291 firms said that they were. 'In 1937 an agreement was reached on the Joint Industrial Council to forbid weekend working in the industry, but this could not be totally enforced either.'<sup>48</sup> The historian of the hosiery trade unions attributed this decline in 'union vigilance and aggressiveness . . . to ageing leaders and male domination',<sup>49</sup> but there were other problems. It was not easy for the unions to exercise effective control over small firms in the villages surrounding the centres of their

<sup>45</sup> *Wool Textile Industry*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>47</sup> 'Principal Changes in Wages in 1936', *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Apr. 1937).

<sup>48</sup> Richard Gurnham, *A History of the Trade Union Movement in the Hosiery and Knitwear Industry, 1776-1976* (Leicester: National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers, 1976), 105.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

strength, and they had no control over firms in other parts of the country, such as Lancashire, the Home Counties, and Scotland.

However, two new leaders came forward. Horace Moulden had been appointed secretary of the Leicester union in 1927, and Jack Brewin secretary of the Ilkeston union a year later. They were close friends and together planned new moves for the unions. In 1933 the joint industrial council agreed to national piece-price lists for the interlock-fabric and fine-gauge departments. This was an 'outstanding achievement. National piece price lists, covering the whole of the Midlands, had never been known before.'<sup>50</sup> They also moved into other parts of the country. In 1935 the Ilkeston union recruited members at the Liverpool Bear Brand factory and in 1936 the Leicester union began recruiting in the Keystone Knitting Mills at Elstree. The firms refused to deal with the unions which meant that strikes were inevitable if Brewin and Moulden were to achieve their objectives. The Elstree strike was called when the firm imposed a wage cut in September 1933, and lasted until the following March. 'A settlement was only made possible by the pressure exerted on the firm by its chief outlet, Marks and Spencer.'<sup>51</sup> Moulden could not persuade the firm to pay the rates set out in the national list, but he obtained a substantial increase. At the Bear Brand plant, where Brewin had asked Moulden to take over, they failed. Two hundred men were called out to enforce the national list in May 1939, but a year later they were forced to abandon the strike without a settlement.

Progress in organization in the villages showed itself in rising membership figures; and improved rural transport, enabling villagers to work in the towns, put pressure on village employers to pay higher wages. 'In both large and small centres of the industry in 1939 "anti-union" firms were sometimes only able to keep their workers out of the local union by paying better wages, or providing better benefits, than those demanded by the union.'<sup>52</sup> In these endeavours Brewin and Moulden received considerable support from the organized employers. During the 1930s the Leicester, Hinckley, and Nottingham employers' associations had appointed full-time secretaries, so that the union officials had the advantage of dealing with professionals on the other side in their negotiations, and where employers 'were slow to meet the unions, the employers on the JIC sometimes brought personal pressure to force their hands'.<sup>53</sup> Another aim of the two men was to convert the National Hosiery Federation, to which the local unions were affiliated, into a single union by amalgamation. Talks had to be abandoned in 1937 because of the opposition of the Hinckley union, which was the richest

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 107.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 115.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

and best-organized of them all. However, the four other unions all voted in favour of amalgamation, and in 1938 Hinckley also voted in favour 'in principle'.

The finishing stages of both the wool and cotton textiles industries were handled by bleachers and dyers organized in their own unions, which came together in 1936 to form the National Union of Dyers' Bleachers and Textile Workers, although there was still a separate union for hosiery finishing workers. The two amalgamating unions had brought with them to the national union their wage agreements providing for wage adjustments on a cost-of-living sliding scale, which continued to operate. Under them increases had already been granted in 1934 and 1935, and there were further advances in 1936 and 1937; but falling prices brought a reduction in 1938.

The National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives shared with the Hosiery Workers the problems of non-observance of its long-standing agreement and the opening of non-federated firms in centres outside the traditional area of union strength; and, as with the Hosiery Workers, two officers came to the forefront in the thirties who were intent on reinvigorating the union. They were George Chester and W. R. Townley, who were elected secretary and president of the union in 1930, and set about stimulating 'an aggressive spirit'. When in 1934 the employers proposed reductions by redefining 'minimum' wages as 'standard wages', the union conference authorized them to reject any proposals for 'lower wage standards and other conditions within the industry', and the union presented the employers with 'six months' notice to terminate the agreement, along with their complaint of widespread failure to observe it'.<sup>54</sup> It was the first time since 1895 that either side had terminated the agreement. In the end the agreement was renewed almost unchanged in January 1935. The union conference of 1934 had also authorized internal constitutional changes to centralize administration and finances, and to increase head-office control over branch officers. Henceforth candidates would have to be judged competent by a national executive subcommittee before they could stand for election. The 1935 agreement was for one year only. The employers wanted to renew it, but the union insisted on changes. It secured a reduction in the working week from forty-eight to forty-six hours (with no change in piece-rates) and an increase in the women's weekly wage rate to two-thirds of the men's rate. This agreement was for two years. In 1938 there was a further reduction in the working week to forty-five hours, with advances of 10p a week in the men's time-rate, 5p a week in

<sup>54</sup> Alan Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874-1957* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 510-14.



the women's time-rate, and 2½ per cent on piece-rates. 'It had been eighteen years since an Agreement . . . gave all operatives an increase in rates.'<sup>55</sup> In addition women working in men's departments were to get the full male rate.

The union also extended its geographical control. An area officer was appointed for the North Midlands. Between 1932 and 1934 the number of women members increased by 6,000—almost nine-tenths of the total increase during the period. The Czech firm BATA had set up a factory in Tilbury where it refused to deal with the union. The union appointed a 'contact officer', recruited some members, and called a strike for recognition in 1937. It sought the intervention of the Ministry of Labour and the Trades Union Congress; and appealed to the Czech government. It also organized a boycott of BATA shops by distributing leaflets outside them. By the end of the year the management was willing to negotiate, and in May 1938 an agreement recognized the union, and guaranteed 'labour conditions not less favourable than those of the National Agreement'.<sup>56</sup>

In the clothing trades, amalgamations had produced a single union, the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers (apart from the small Waterproof Garment Workers' Union in Manchester). The Tailors and Garment Workers negotiated pay and conditions through a two-tier system of collective bargaining. It was represented on a group of trade boards, set up in 1910 and after the First World War, which now covered ready-made and wholesale bespoke tailoring, retail bespoke tailoring, dressmaking, and women's light clothing, the hat, cap, and millinery trade, and corsets. For most of these sections of the industry there were separate boards for Scotland. In addition, since 1919-20 the union had held national agreements negotiated with the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Federation, the Wholesale Mantle and Costume Manufacturers' Federation, and the Shirt Collar and Tie Manufacturers' Federation. Its strategy was to negotiate improvements in its agreements with these federations, and then to persuade the trade boards to approve advances in their statutory rates as nearly equivalent as possible to the negotiated wage rates and conditions. The statutory rates would then become binding on the non-federated competitors of the federated firms. Through these means the union secured a series of pay increases for its members in the years 1935-37.

The federated firms welcomed this protection against undercutting, and their attitude towards the union can be judged from an addendum to the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' agreement:

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 524.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 528-32.

The Federation has found it mutually convenient to have some organisation representing the workers with which to negotiate collectively on their behalf, and, while it is not compulsory for an employee of any member of the Federation to join a Trade Union, the Federation recognises the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers as the organisation representing workers employed on garment-making processes (other than those holding departmental or managerial positions).

One development that the union and its members had to cope with during the interwar years was a rapid mechanization of these 'garment-making processes'. As one delegate put it to the annual conference of the union in 1937: 'I have lived long enough to see almost every process usurped by the machine, among them cutting, pressing, seaming, felting, padding, basting, buttonholing and buttoning and with the conveyor belt to carry subdivided portions of the work from one operative to another.'<sup>57</sup>

### *Construction*

Collective bargaining in construction was conducted mainly through the National Joint Council for the Building Industry in England and Wales and its regional and local joint wages committees. The constituents of the council were the National Federation of Building Trade Employers and the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives. Its wage agreement included no less than eleven sets of rates of pay which applied in different parts of the country according to their 'grades'. However, two of the eleven sets applied only to inner and outer London, and, by 1939, 80 per cent of building workers outside London were in grade A areas. All rates were adjusted up or down by a cost-of-living sliding scale which in January 1934 fixed a 'datum' A-grade rate of 8 $\frac{2}{3}$ p an hour for craftsmen to correspond to a cost-of-living index figure of 78 points over 1914. In February each year the rates were varied up or down by a halfpenny ( $\frac{3}{4}$ p) an hour for every movement of 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  points in the index up to the previous December. The labourer's rate was fixed at 75 per cent of the craft rate, and his adjustment was made to the nearest farthing ( $\frac{5}{8}$ p). In 1934 no increase fell due under the sliding scale, and that was also true in 1935 although prices were rising, along with the volume of construction business, which was already profiting from the building boom of the 1930s. The council therefore agreed in April to alter the 'datum' cost-of-living figure to 65 points, which increased the craft rate by a penny ( $\frac{5}{8}$ p) to be paid in two instalments of a halfpenny

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Margaret Stewart and Leslie Hunter, *The Needle is Threaded* (London, Heinemann and Newman Neame, 1964), 197-8.

each, one immediately and one in January 1936. By the end of 1936 the cost-of-living figure had justified another increase of a halfpenny for craftsmen, which was paid in February 1937, and another increase of the same amount was paid in February 1938.

There was also the possibility of securing a pay increase as a travelling allowance or as a temporary extra, and, for workers in areas graded below A, by regrading; and the national council had established a grading commission for judging applications. However, the April 1935 pay agreement placed a moratorium on regrading applications for three years, unless they were submitted jointly by the local employers and unions. Nevertheless, said the employers' annual report for 1936, there was 'considerable activity' in several regions on new aerodromes and military camps, so it had been agreed that the chairman and officers of the grading commission could take decisions on applications for extra payments at such sites. The report also recorded that the Southern Counties' Regional Joint Committee had defined and graded every part of the region, and the national joint council had approved a proposal that the Eastern Counties' Joint Committee should do the same. In 1937 many more claims for exceptional payments on defence works in rural areas were submitted, and a committee representing the contracting departments and both sides of the industry put together relevant information to guide the regions in assessing these claims. The grading commission, said the employers' report for 1937, recommended that 'special inconvenience and special expenses' should override the practice of rejecting all claims for 'exceptional margins' from grade A areas. When the moratorium on disputed grading applications expired in May 1938, a large number of applications were submitted, most of which were appealed to the council.

Other grounds for increases in pay were specially inconvenient or heavy jobs, and tool allowances. In January 1938 the employers' federation set up a special committee to consider the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers' claim for a tool allowance and in 1939 an allowance of  $\frac{5}{8}$ p a day was granted, on condition that the union relinquished the existing allowance for cutting and altering concrete. Later in the year the federation's general-purposes committee considered a claim for extra payments to labourers for sawing, rubbing, and using saw frames and lathes. The committee ruled that there should be 'no slavish allocation of specified rates to specified machines'. Another topic discussed by the national joint council was the promotion of a scheme of insurance against 'inclement weather'. To be successful it would have to be compulsory, so they approached the Ministry of Labour for assistance. The ministry wanted to be sure that the scheme had the support of the majority of employers and employees in the

industry. This seemed to be a difficult hurdle to surmount, so the council argued that the criterion should be a majority of *organized* employers and employees. Eventually the proposal was abandoned.

The constitution of the national joint council provided for joint regional and national disputes commissions. During these years the fixing of metal windows was the cause of a number of disputes. The executive committee of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers issued instructions that the 'fixing of metal windows to wood surrounds must be done by qualified woodworkers, and must be claimed for our members'.<sup>58</sup> Other trades disagreed. In 1938 a dispute in London went to a regional disputes commission which agreed that the work should be 'executed by building craftsmen'. However, it also held that the term covered not only the Woodworkers' members, but members of the Transport and General Workers' Union who as 'specialist fixers . . . were both assembling and fixing the steel window frames and who were being paid craftsmen's rates'. The Woodworkers then struck five sites. A national commission confirmed the regional finding and proposed a tripartite conference of the two unions and the Metal Windows Manufacturers' Federation, which failed to resolve the problem. The national commission then met with representatives of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives to discuss the enforcement of its decision, after which the Woodworkers' executive sent its members back to work, but continued to protest against the decision.<sup>59</sup>

The Woodworkers were especially watchful over the rights and privileges of their craft, and the executive was always ready to support its district 'management' committees, as they were called, in disputes over infringements. They would have nothing to do with piece-work or bonus payments. Payment must be at plain time rates. If a firm introduced any form of payment by results, it must be black-listed so that no union member could work there, or, if the members accepted it, they must be expelled. The executive also insisted on the right of members to refuse to work with non-unionists. When in March 1936 a regional disputes commission instructed the London management committee to get its members who had struck on this issue to go back to work, the executive told the committee that the decision 'must be accepted for the time being', but an officer would be sent to try to persuade the recalcitrants to join, and, if the committee were still dissatisfied, they should appeal to a national commission.<sup>60</sup>

'Labour-only' subcontracting, which became so widespread in the industry after the 1939-45 war, was already to be found at this time.

<sup>58</sup> Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers' Executive, *Minutes* (4 Jan. 1935).

<sup>59</sup> National Federation of Building Trade Employers, *Annual Report* (1938).

<sup>60</sup> Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers' Executive, *Minutes* (6 MAR. 1936).



Indeed it had been endemic in the construction industry in the nineteenth century, if not earlier, in the 'gang-master' system. On 5 May 1934 the Woodworkers' executive ruled that if a non-member undertook such a contract, a union member could work for him, provided he observed the 'recognised conditions', but no union member could take on such a contract and, if he did so, no other union member could 'accept employment under him'. By contrast, in 1936 the National Association of Operative Plasterers took a case to a dispute commission, arguing that if a subcontractor was himself working with the tools he was not a bona fide employer, and must have a union card.

Bricklayers, who, along with the stonemasons, were organized by the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, had a reputation for belligerence. The employers' annual report for 1937 described a strike at the London Earls Court Exhibition site in February:

Many hundreds of workmen on that job went on strike with the definite object of forcing extra concessions above those available in the National Joint Council Agreement. This strike had followed upon an almost consistent succession of similar disputes on the same site and the position was complicated by the fact that the main contractor (who employed no labour on this job direct) was not a member of the Federation<sup>61</sup> and had previously taken steps which resulted in concessions being made in response to agitators among those employed on the job. In particular the bricklayers were being paid a [25p] a week extra allowance and were co-operating with the other trades to get a similar allowance for all men on the job. All this was done unofficially. . . . The strike lasted for nine days and there were dangers of the trouble spreading to the Central London district generally. . . . It was realised that the situation could only be saved by a firm stand on the part of all the contractors working on the job. Eventually such a firm attitude was successfully secured, the main contractor applied for membership and notices were posted removing the extra concessions which had previously been granted, intimating that this notification resulted from a decision of the National Federation of Building Employers and the London Master Builders' Association. . . . It is believed that the firm action taken on this occasion had considerable effect in . . . convincing them [the men, who had returned to work on the day after these notices were posted] that they were better advised by the officials of their union than by such agitator elements as were causing a constant succession of unofficial strikes.

Not all the unions, however, had advised their members against joining the strike. On 5 February 1937 the Woodworkers' executive sanctioned a withdrawal of labour 'to obtain the extra [25p] granted to bricklayers'. It piously decided to tell the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives that the fault lay with the union which accepted extra payment without insisting that the other unions were also given it.

<sup>61</sup> He would therefore not be subject to the federation's discipline.

Demands for payment above agreed rates were fostered by the building boom. High profits made employers especially anxious to finish one contract and get on to the next, in the belief that there were many more to come. The employers' report for 1939 noted that many stoppages had occurred on 'Government contracts in remote rural areas'.

In some cases, generally where Contractors were engaged on hutment camp construction for Government Departments on a cost basis, there has been too great a readiness to make concessions in the face of such threats, instead of invoking and supporting the joint machinery. . . . The effects of some of these concessions have been liable to demoralise the labour on the jobs themselves as well as to disturb many other jobs in the same part of the country.

Despite disputes, the general impression from the employers' records is that they were well satisfied with their relationships with the unions. Their annual report for 1937 asserted that 'The friendly relationship between the building employers and operatives in this country has . . . been maintained and . . . strengthened as a result of progress during the year with activities such as the inception of a Joint Consultative Committee with the Government Departments and the preparation of a scheme for insurance against time lost through inclement weather.' On 25 February 1937 they had held an informal conference with the union federation to discuss the regulation of shop stewards and card stewards, standard forms of contract, shift-working, and possible government pressure for dilution of labour. Another informal conference was held on 25 July 1938 of which the employers' annual report for that year remarked: 'While the results of such informal Conferences are not always capable of precise formulation, it is found that the general improvement in atmosphere is usually such as to render the Conference well worth while.' As for industrial disputes during the year, the same report observed that most cases which reached the National Disputes Commission came from London and 'Most of these cases arose from the discharge of employees who claimed, through their Unions, that they had been victimised by their employers either because they were card stewards or for other reasons. All the cases of this nature proved capable of speedy settlement . . . and the decisions given were accepted by all parties.'

Although it was the most important of the national negotiating bodies in construction, the National Joint Council for the Building Industry was by no means the only one. There was a separate Scottish Joint Council for the Building Industry, and a Civil Engineering Construction Conciliation Board for Great Britain. There were separate joint boards, councils, and or committees for the demolition industry, electrical

contracting, fence erection, glazing, mastic asphalt, monumental masonry, plumbing, and terrazo mosaic. There was a board for Scottish Plasterers and a committee for roofing contractors and their employees on the north-east coast, along with other local bodies. There was even a Conciliation Board for Engine and Crane Drivers employed by members of the London Master Builders' Association. Most of these bodies followed the agreements of the National Joint Council for the Building Industry, with or without variations. The Scottish Building Council's sliding-scale agreement had a slightly different datum-line from that of the agreement for England and Wales, and the Civil Engineering Board settled a number of additional payments over the labourer's rate for 'semi-skilled' workers handling machinery and power tools. The most interesting of them, however, was the Joint Industrial Council for Electrical Contracting.

The council had a single organization on each side: the National Federated Electrical Association and the Electrical Trades Union. The former had been set up in the First World War to combat 'leap-frogging' wage demands. It signed a recognition agreement with the Electricians and in 1917, with the support of the union, approached the Committee on Production (which served as a national arbitration tribunal at that time) for 'one single arbitration for the whole country'.<sup>62</sup> In 1919 the two sides established their council, and agreed graded rates of pay for different parts of the country, which were to be standard rates—no less and no more. In 1921 they added a cost-of-living sliding scale. The council carefully vetted local working rules to avoid too much variation, and in 1939 a consolidated National Working Rules Agreement was drawn up. Both sides set their faces against any form of piece-work.

All this was not so very different from the National Joint Council for the Building Industry. The great difference lay in the lengths to which the two sides of the electrical contracting industry went to enforce standardization. The employers' association had secured generous trading discounts from suppliers, and when, in the late 1920s, a number of cases of payment above the rates were discovered, the firms concerned 'were either forced to comply or . . . expelled with the loss of trading discounts and exclusion from local contracting groups that this implied'.<sup>63</sup> At the time of the building strike at the Earls Court Exhibition site in 1937 the London district committee of the union called 100 electricians out over a claim for 'dirt money':

The Association informed the ETU that it was holding the union responsible and threatened a national lock-out. The union executive ordered the men back

<sup>62</sup> Howard Gospel, 'Employers' Organisations' (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1975), 290.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 293.

and . . . then expelled the London Committee. The strike lasted seven weeks and in the end was settled by a compromise with some dirt money being paid for the period during which the conditions on the site were agreed to be abnormal.<sup>64</sup>

### *Paper and Printing*

There were four main employers' organizations in paper and printing: the Employers' Federation of Paper Makers, the British Federation of Master Printers, the Newspaper Proprietors' Association which represented the London papers, and the Newspaper Society which represented the provincial papers. There were also four main unions. Two of them were craft unions: the London Society of Compositors and the Typographical Association which organized in the provinces. The National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants' membership was mainly among less-skilled workers, but also included craftsmen, and, originally a London union, had spread to the provinces. The National Union of Printing, Bookbinding, Machine Ruling and Paper Workers' was the most diverse of them all. Originally formed by an amalgamation of unions of paper-workers, warehousemen, and cutters, it had absorbed other unions of skilled and less-skilled paper- and printing workers, and a further amalgamation with the Amalgamated Society of Paper Workers followed in 1936. It was also the largest of the four unions, and nearly half its members were women. There were several other smaller unions, of which the more important were: the National Society of Electrotypers and Stereotypers; the Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers, Engravers and Process Workers; the Amalgamated Society of Lithographic Printers; the Printing Machine Managers' Society; and the Scottish Typographical Association. They were all craft unions.

Negotiations for paper-making were conducted between the Employers' Federation of Paper Makers and the Paper Workers (and, until 1936, the Amalgamated Society of Paper Workers). The Newspaper Proprietors' Association negotiated directly with the London unions; but both the British Federation of Master Printers and the Newspaper Society were represented on the Joint Industrial Council for Printing and Allied Trades on which the unions were represented by their federal body, the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation. The crucial distinction between the two groups of newspaper publishers in relation to representation on the joint industrial council was that many provincial newspapers were owned by companies that also operated in general printing, but the London proprietors kept to publishing newspapers.

<sup>64</sup> Howard Gospel, 'Employers Organisations' 289-90.



During the early years of the Depression the paper-making firms had forgone reductions due under their sliding-scale agreement, but in June 1933 they operated a cut of 20p a week in the wages of their employees. The unions instructed their branches to resist. 'Several branches stopped work, which led to a modification of the demands in some mills, but the position was weakened . . . by the action of members in certain districts accepting the reduction.'<sup>65</sup> There were no pay cuts and no worsening of conditions in printing. The Master Printers had discussed cuts along with a series of proposals for altering working practices, and even gave notice to the unions that they wished to negotiate changes in their agreement, but they did not pursue it after it became evident that the unions were unresponsive. Unemployment in printing remained well below the national average.

In 1934 the conciliation officers of the Ministry of Labour assisted the Paper Workers to negotiate a restoration of half the cut in pay imposed in the previous year, and the remainder was restored in 1936 when a new agreement was made terminating the sliding scale and raising the rates of pay in Scotland and the west of England to the level that applied elsewhere. The printing unions, however, made no attempt to negotiate general pay increases. They turned their attention to hours of work. Two proposals were discussed by the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation in 1934: one was for the introduction in provincial newspapers of a shift system of eleven days and eleven nights over four weeks, which, with the eight-hour shifts, would make an average of forty-four hours at work each week; the second was a general forty-hour week without reduction of pay. In the following year agreement was reached on the provincial-newspaper shift system, which, it was claimed, would cut out overtime and therefore assist to absorb the unemployed. The federation held a ballot on the proposal to ask the employers for a forty-hour week. It was carried by 93,459 votes to 14,978. The claim was submitted, and negotiations continued through 1936 and into 1937. The employers offered forty-six and a half hours on days, and forty-two and a half hours on nights, in return for concessions from the unions on a list of items including apprenticeship, overtime, and local customs. The federation rejected this proposal in March 1937, and in April, when no further concessions were offered by the employers, decided to hold a strike ballot for a forty-four-hour week. This was carried by 85,593 votes to 26,552. Further talks led to a compromise for forty-five hours to operate in November. The ballot form had included a 'failing an amended offer' clause, so the federation could accept the compromise

<sup>65</sup> Clement J. Bundock, *The Story of the National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 352.

without a further vote. The agreement bound both sides to refrain from seeking major alterations in their national agreements for the next three years.

The wage structure of the printing industry included a grading system for provincial towns akin to that of the building industry, but even more complicated. Claims for regrading were therefore an alternative to national negotiations as a means to pay increases, but very little was achieved in this way by the unions in the 1930s. To begin with, the Typographical Association insisted on pursuing its claims for regrading independently of the other unions until 1936, when it informed the Master Printers that they were abandoning their 'attempt to modify the wage pattern by regrading individual towns, and adding the hint of an impending approach on "other constitutional lines"'. Thereafter the other unions took up the issue through their federation 'but they made no progress and with the outbreak of the War gratefully decided to postpone the matter "until a more opportune time"'.<sup>66</sup>

A more rewarding method of supplementing national pay negotiations was work-place bargaining over piece-work, 'allowances' and 'extras'. However, in the absence of national wage increases and any substantial regrading, work-place bargaining was not enough to raise printing workers' earnings at the same pace as the cost of living or as the earnings of wage-earners generally over the years 1933-9.

### *The Railways*

Up to 1933 the four main-line railway companies had negotiated with the three railway unions—the National Union of Railwaymen, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, and the Railway Clerks' Association—through a central wages board, with the right of appeal to a national wages board of seventeen (six each to represent the companies and the unions, and four the railway users,<sup>67</sup> with an independent chairman). The weakness of this cumbersome appeal tribunal had been exposed in 1932 when the companies proposed that the existing pay reductions of (for most workers) 5 per cent of earnings (with a minimum adult wage of £2) should be replaced by a general 10 per cent reduction with a £1.90 minimum. As the unions would not agree, the case was referred to the national wages board, which delivered no fewer than six verdicts. The companies were prepared to accept the chairman's report which opted for modified cuts,

<sup>66</sup> John Child, *Industrial Relations in the British Printing Industry* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967),

<sup>277</sup><sup>67</sup> One each was chosen by the Trades Union Congress, the Co-operative Union, the Associated Chambers of Commerce, and the Federation of British Industry.

but the unions refused to do so. The companies decided not to insist, but gave the required twelve months' notice to terminate the procedure agreement; and early in 1934 they presented their proposals for a new procedure.

The central wages board was to be replaced by a Railway Staff National Council with much the same composition and functions, but the new appeals tribunal was to consist of three independent members without special knowledge or experience in railway matters. Its deliberations were to be held in private and its decisions were to be binding on both parties, but its scope was more restricted than that of the national wages board in that it could not deal 'with matters concerning individuals or small groups'.<sup>68</sup> The railway unions were unhappy that the tribunal should include no members with railway experience. They considered that the hearings should be held in public; and as John Marchbank, the Railwaymen's new general secretary who had been elected to succeed 'Charlie' Cramp at the end of 1933, told his annual conference in 1934, their union was not 'prepared to accept the Tribunal's decisions as binding'.<sup>69</sup> The Railwaymen, the only railway union that recruited in the railway workshops, also wanted the machinery to be extended to include workshop staff.

The companies were anxious to have some means of resolving issues on which they could not reach agreement with the unions and, as agreement was also necessary to establish an appeals tribunal, they had to make concessions. They decided to allow the membership of the Railway Staff National Tribunal, as it was to be called, to be extended to include six assessors, three to be nominated by the companies, and one each by the three unions. Hearings could be in public at the request of the parties, and the decisions of the tribunal were not to be binding on the parties. The companies did not relish the prospect of extending the machinery to cover workshop staff who were represented by thirty-seven engineering unions in addition to the Railwaymen, and they doubted whether those unions would favour the proposal; but they were willing to provide that the procedure might be extended, by agreement, to apply to other grades of railway employees, including workshop staff. At a special conference in February 1935 the Railwaymen's representatives voted by 47 to 32 to accept these concessions 'as providing a reasonable and fair basis upon which future negotiations can be conducted'. The other unions concurred.

Negotiations for a restoration of the cuts had already taken place, and in August 1934 the parties had agreed to a restoration of half the

<sup>68</sup> Philip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 542.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

amounts deducted, in two stages. This meant that those whose earnings had been cut by 5 per cent were to get 1.25 per cent of it back in October 1934 and another 1.25 per cent in January 1935. The minimum adult wage was to be raised to £2.02 and no deduction was to exceed 30p a week. In the railway workshops, where the cut had been  $4\frac{1}{3}$  per cent, the companies also conceded a small modification of the cut. Aware that the companies' earnings had improved since 1932, the unions wrote to them on 25 September 1935 to ask for the full restoration of all cuts, including reductions in the rates of overtime pay and payments for night and Sunday duties. Negotiations were slow. The companies' spokesmen argued that 'owing to the increased cost of materials the companies used, the improvement in their financial position was only a slight one'.<sup>70</sup> Eventually in March 1936 they offered to restore half the remainder of the deduction. After hearing that the directors of the London and North Eastern Railways had 'thought that a further *reduction* in railwaymen's wages was justifiable' and that their chairman 'had favoured referring the unions' claim to the Railway Staff National Tribunal, but had been over-ruled by the others',<sup>71</sup> the union representatives decided not to appeal to the tribunal, but to recommend the acceptance of the offer.

On 12 May a special conference of Railwaymen voted by 49 to 31 to instruct their representatives to resume negotiations and to report back. At this point the unity between the three unions, which had persisted through all the negotiations concerning the cuts so far, was broken by the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen who submitted a claim for a six-hour working day and other substantial concessions. Both claims went to the tribunal, which, chaired by Sir Arthur Salter, issued its first award on 27 July. From 16 August the deduction from earnings was to be 1.25 per cent and the full rate for overtime was to be restored, but the existing rates for Sunday and night work were not to be altered. The unions and the companies accepted the award, with the Railwaymen's special conference voting 53 to 26 for acceptance. The tribunal's second award found against the claims of the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, but announced that if railway revenues continued to improve, 'railway employees should obtain a share in the improvement without waiting for the large increase in railway profits that would be required before the Standard Revenue (£51 million) could be reached'. This figure of standard revenue was prescribed in the Railway Act of 1921 which laid down that railway charges should be such as to yield an annual net revenue equivalent to that of 1913. In fact the figure had been achieved only once since then, in 1923. The railway companies were also

<sup>70</sup> Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, 548.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*



restricted in their pricing policy by the requirement that increased charges had to be approved by the Railway Rates Tribunal.

In March 1937 the three unions agreed to resubmit their claim for full restoration of the cuts, but each added further proposals. The Railwaymen wanted a £2.50 male adult minimum wage; the Railway Clerks asked for a thirty-six-hour working week; and the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen sought several concessions, including a six-hour working day because of the intensification of their work. These claims were rejected by the companies, and heard by the tribunal on 20 July. The prospect for the unions was improved by the announcement a few days later of the decision of the Railway Rates Tribunal to allow the companies to increase their charges by 5 per cent. The Railway Staff National Tribunal's third report, published on 9 August, proposed that all deductions should cease from 16 August, so that the remaining cut of 1.25 per cent from earnings was restored, along with full payment for work on nights and Sundays. There was to be an increase of 5p a week for those on less than £2.25 and of 2½p for those on £2.25. There was also a small concession on bank-holiday pay and compensation for clerks working long spells of night duty. Soon afterwards the companies agreed to the termination of all cuts in the railway workshops.

Further claims from the unions for general pay increases submitted in 1938 were rejected by the companies, and received nothing more than sympathy from the tribunal, which acknowledged that 'a strong case has been presented for making an increase upon the lowest rates of pay a first claim as soon as the financial position makes any substantial concession possible'. In the early months of 1939 railway receipts, suffering from competition from road transport, were down on 1938, but by 30 June, when the three unions met the companies again, rapid rearmament had boosted railway revenues. The Railway Clerks, in a spirit of generosity rare in the trade union world, had withdrawn their separate claims in support of the Railwaymen's proposed £2.50 minimum wage; and the companies, heeding the broad hint given by the tribunal, agreed to raise the minimum rate for adult male workers to £2.25. Many porters received an increase of 20p a week, and the junior footplate grade, the engine-cleaners, gained 15p a week.

Apart from this, the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, who had asked for substantial pay increases, a six-hour working day and an extra week's holiday each year, got nothing. They handed in strike notices for midnight on 26 August; but the Minister of Labour, Ernest Brown, persuaded them to cancel the notices on account of the worsening international situation and with a hint that they should resubmit their claims. The Railwaymen were also in a belligerent mood. On 22 August a special conference of their union had narrowly rejected a resolution to

strike for the £2.50 minimum, and decided to resubmit the claim with the intention of sending it on to the tribunal if the companies rejected it again. Meanwhile the companies agreed with the shopmen's representatives to apply the £2.25 minimum in the railway workshops. Apart from the lowest-paid grades, the pay of most railway workers stood at the same figure at the outbreak of the war as it had in January 1931. In the interval the cost-of-living index had risen by 9 per cent, and some other groups of organized workers had secured advances of more than that in their pay. It was small wonder that the railwaymen, one of the most strongly unionized groups of workers in the country, were feeling impatient with the results of collective bargaining on their behalf by the summer of 1939.

There was, however, one small group of higher-paid railway workers who had gained an increase of pay in addition to the restoration of their cuts. They belonged to the grade of signalmen, the most skilled and highly paid grade represented by the Railwaymen, apart from its minority membership among the footplate staff. They were paid on a 'marks' system which graded signal boxes according to the number of lever movements made by the men who worked in them. This system was becoming antiquated due to the spread of power-operated signals and electrically operated controls. The labour of moving levers was reduced and the number of signalmen required was falling, due to the introduction of power-operated signals, and the replacement of small signal boxes by remote control; but the concentration required of those who remained was increasing. Since 1932 a series of conferences of signalmen's representatives had been trying to devise a new system. They ended up by proposing some slight adjustments to the allocation of marks and a new grading system for boxes with wage rates of up to £4 a week. When their claim was submitted to the Railway Staff National Council in 1938 it was rejected by the companies, so the union sent it on to the tribunal, which issued its fourth award on 29 July. Some adjustments were made in the allocation of marks, and increases of 12½p and 25p a week were made to signalmen in boxes with the highest numbers of marks.

The most important railway undertaking outside the main-line companies was the London Underground, which formed part of the London Traffic Combine. The combine and the three railway unions had already established a system of negotiation similar to that of the main-line companies, and settled similar rates of pay, except that the London cuts in the Depression were smaller and restored in 1933. No major changes were made when the London Passenger Transport Board took over in 1934. As there were no general advances in pay for main-line staff (other than the restoration of cuts) between 1934 and

1939, rates of pay for underground staff remained unaltered over that period, except that porters received increases equivalent to those granted to main-line porters in 1938 and 1939.

*Other Transport*

By 1934 collective bargaining had long been established in road passenger transport in London and in tramways nationally. Although the London Passenger Transport Board had taken over responsibility for London's road-passenger-transport services from a number of companies and local authorities only in July 1933, most of these undertakings had been united under the control of the London Traffic Combine for many years, and the negotiating arrangements of the combine were transferred to the board all the more easily because the Transport and General Workers were, except in the maintenance workshops, the sole union concerned. The National Joint Industrial Council for the Tramways Industry covered both municipal and company tramway undertakings in the provinces, and had covered them in London until its Metropolitan District Council ceased to function soon after the London Passenger Transport Board took over. The National Union of General and Municipal Workers was represented on the workers' side of the national council because it organized tramwaymen in several undertakings; and so were the Engineers, the Electricians, and the Vehicle Builders, because of their membership among maintenance staff.

Wage cuts had been negotiated for tramwaymen in 1932. The national council agreed to restore them generally in 1934, but they had already been restored in London in 1933, because of the successful resistance of the London busmen to the cuts the London Traffic Combine had proposed to apply to their section earlier that year. Over the years the London busmen had acquired a reputation as a militant and independent group of trade-unionists, first as a separate union formed in 1913, and, since 1922, as a section of the Transport and General Workers' Union. They had secured a special position in this union under what became known as the Anderton's Hotel Agreement, signed soon after the amalgamation, whereby the Central Bus Committee in London had its own full-time secretary and the right of direct access to the union executive instead of proceeding through the National Passenger Transport Trade Group. In 1932 the union's general secretary, Ernest Bevin, failed to persuade the London General Omnibus Company, as it then was, to withdraw a proposal for a wage cut and the dismissal of 800 busmen as redundant. On 31 July the company posted notices of the dismissals. Unofficial meetings called to protest led

to the creation of a committee of unofficial garage delegates which later became known as the 'rank and file committee', and the terms offered by the company were rejected by a ballot vote of the section. Bevin reopened negotiations and came back to a conference of the official garage delegates with a draft agreement under which the company could introduce such higher speeds as might 'be found safe and convenient' by the management, in return for a withdrawal of the proposed redundancies and the wage cuts, and an undertaking to divide the savings that would result from the higher speeds between the company and the busmen. Some of the savings arose because higher speeds allowed the 'maximum total time on duty' and the number of 'spreadovers' to be cut, thus reducing overtime earnings. Forty years later the agreement would have been called a 'productivity deal'. Despite persistent criticism by the rank-and-file committee, a majority of the delegates approved the agreement, which was then ratified. The rank-and-file committee continued to make its presence felt by publishing a lively journal, the *Busman's Punch*, getting its candidate, Bernard Sharkey, elected to the Central Bus Committee, and spreading a strike over a change in schedules at one garage in January 1933 to twenty or more other garages. The two outstanding leaders of the movement were Bert Papworth, secretary of the Chelverton Road Garage branch of the union, and Frank Snelling of the Merton Garage branch.

Throughout the interwar period the bus and coach section of road passenger transport grew rapidly. Between 1929 and 1938 estimated passenger miles increased by 70 per cent while the figure for tramways and trolleys fell. Local authorities were switching from trams to buses, or developing bus services in addition to their trams; and outside the area of London Transport's monopoly<sup>72</sup> hundreds of private bus companies had sprung into existence. By the mid-thirties many of them had been absorbed by three combines, Tillings, British Electric Traction, and Scottish Motor Traction. Since 1928 the railway companies had been authorized by Parliament to invest in road transport, and had put nearly £10 million into bus and coach companies. The National Union of Railwaymen had 'followed the flag', setting about organizing busmen in competition with the Transport and General Workers. In 1932 it had failed to persuade Bevin to join in the establishment of an amalgamated union for transport workers and had since come to an agreement with its rival on spheres of influence. Fifty undertakings were allotted to the Transport and General Workers and eleven, six of them in the South and West Country, to the Railwaymen;

<sup>72</sup> Bus companies that were not part of the London Traffic Combine but within the board's area were taken over by the board to form the Country Bus Section and Green Line Coaches.



and joint recruitment was to be permitted in Ribble Motor Services.<sup>73</sup> Thereafter both unions strove to increase their membership in, and to secure agreements with, their allotted companies.

The strategy developed by Bevin and the national secretary of his Road Passenger Transport Group, Harold Clay, was to convert the National Joint Council for the Tramways Industry into a joint council for local authorities' road-passenger-transport services;<sup>74</sup> and to create a new joint council for the privately owned bus industry. A step towards the achievement of the first objective was taken in December 1935 when, following the negotiation of a wage increase of 12½p a week for tramwaymen, a National Municipal Omnibus Agreement was signed, leading to the establishment in 1937 of the Joint Industrial Council for Municipal Road Passenger Transport (Tramways, Trolleybuses and Motor Omnibuses). Progress towards the second objective was slower, but collective bargaining on behalf of company busmen was assisted both by the law and by the formation of the combines. The Road Traffic Act 1930 had laid down that area traffic commissioners could withhold licences for services proposed by bus and coach operators paying rates of wages and offering conditions of service inferior to those of employees working for government contractors, thus giving the unions a right to intervene where this condition was not met. 'Many of the companies which were taken over [by the combines] were paternalistic, easy-going little companies, and the new owners introduced methods of rationalization, which were opposed by the men, who turned, in many cases for the first time, to union organization for protection.'<sup>75</sup> However, successful recruitment brought problems for the unions. Bevin wrote in his report for the third quarter of 1935 that he found the provincial busmen a 'difficult and peculiar section to deal with'. As soon as 'we secure a measure of organisation, the first thing they want to do is strike . . . I really view with apprehension bus strikes in the provinces'—because he doubted 'their staying power'. At the beginning of 1936 he attributed the decision of the Omnibus Owners' Association 'against the establishment of national machinery for the provincial company-owned omnibus undertakings' to an unofficial strike in Northampton.

Unrest among provincial busmen was fostered by the rank-and-file movement in London, whose leading members paid visits to provincial bus branches. The movement had by now established almost complete control over the Central London Bus Committee and its delegate conferences. Bert Papworth had been elected as one of the two

<sup>73</sup> Bagwell, 507–8.

<sup>74</sup> By this time most of the company-owned tramway undertakings had either been absorbed by London Transport or converted to bus operation.

<sup>75</sup> H. A. Clegg, *Labour Relations in London Transport* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), 117–18.

members from the London area to the union executive. The officers of the movement had taken the lead in a number of unofficial strikes over issues such as discipline and alterations to bus routes and schedules. They had also set an objective for the London bus section: the achievement of a seven-hour working day in place of the current eight hours. They sought to extend their movement to the other sections of London Transport: to the underground railway staff, to the tramwaymen and trolley-men, to the Country Bus and Green Line staff, and to the maintenance staff. For a time they had some success with a Justice for London's Tramwaymen's Committee; but a strike over meal reliefs called by this committee in March 1936, which it intended to spread throughout the tram and trolley fleet, collapsed after union officials told a mass meeting to return to work and the board threatened dismissals. As events were to show, the provincial busmen provided more fertile soil in which the movement's propaganda could take root.

In March 1936 the London Central Bus Committee asked the union executive to terminate its agreement and to submit a claim for a seven-hour working day. Bevin pointed out that the cost would far exceed the total surplus from the board's bus operations, without allowing for capital charges or overheads; 'it would be fatal to this Union to lead men to believe that they can obtain something and then disappoint them'.<sup>76</sup> In the end, however, he reluctantly allowed the claim to be lodged. On 16 November the board rejected it. The executive reduced the claim to seven and a half hours and asked for an examination of a list of aspects of bus operation in central London that might facilitate the concession. Lord Ashfield, the chairman of the board, promised an interim response in February. It was not encouraging. On 31 March notice was given of an official strike by Central busmen at midnight on 30 April. Final rejection from the board came on 23 April. The intervention of the Ministry of Labour achieved nothing. The strike began, with the coronation of George VI due on 12 May. The date of the strike had not been chosen with an eye to winning popular support for the busmen. On 14 April an unofficial strike had begun among busmen employed by Maidstone and District Motor Services in Kent. By the beginning of May busmen were on strike also in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, and East Yorkshire. An unofficial conference of provincial delegates was held at Chelmsford on 28 April to work out a common programme, but on 5 May Harold Clay met a similar conference where it was agreed that the union should arrange a general return to work in the provinces without victimization, to be followed by negotiations on local grievances and the submission of a national claim.

<sup>76</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *General Secretary's First Quarterly Report* (1936).

On 1 May the Minister of Labour appointed a court of inquiry, chaired by John Forster (one of the ministry's regular choices for such a job), to investigate the London dispute. Hearings began the following day. Bevin presented the busmen's case, which he said was justified by the effect on their health of working under the strains of London's traffic conditions. He asserted that, taken by themselves, the financial returns from the bus section would cover the cost of a reduction of the working day to seven and a half hours, and that it was only the board's insistence that its operations overall must be financially viable that justified its assertion that it could not afford it. After the end of the fourth day's hearings, at which Bevin appealed to the members of the court not to make their decision 'purely on the mundane consideration of a statistical basis',<sup>77</sup> it produced its interim report which found that on the question of health

a prima facie case has been made out for further investigation by a properly qualified body specially constituted to deal forthwith with this important matter.

Should such a body find that the complaints as to injury to health made on behalf of the men are substantiated, then, in our judgement, immediate and appropriate steps should be taken, either by reduction of hours and/or by such other measures as may be agreed to meet the position.<sup>78</sup>

On 8 April the board offered to accept the findings, and to negotiate on immediate steps to ease the strain on Central busmen, with recourse to arbitration, if that was wanted, provided that the question of a cut in the working week was left until after the report of the proposed inquiry. On 11 April the union executive called this a '75 to 80 per cent victory' and asked the busmen 'to reflect whether it is not now wise to authorise the Union to proceed to construct a new agreement and take advantage of all the recommendations and possibilities'.<sup>79</sup> The men rejected this advice by a vote of ten to one.

Now that it was established that, by itself, a bus strike could not paralyse London, even with the crowds of Coronation visitors there, the Central Bus Committee tried to extend the strike to the trams and trolleys. On 18 May Papworth and Snelling pleaded with the London Trams Council to call its members out, but the plea was decisively rejected. The bus committee then showed its desperation by asking the executive to call the tramwaymen out in breach of their agreement. On 26 May the executive decided to terminate the strike, and the men returned to work two days later on terms much the same as the board had offered. With over 24,000 men out, the strike accounted for a loss of

<sup>77</sup> *The Times* (7 May 1937).

<sup>78</sup> Cmd. 5454 (1937).

<sup>79</sup> *Transport and General Workers' Record* (May 1937).

565,000 working days, making it the biggest British strike between the cotton strike of 1932 and the outbreak of the war. On 15 June a new agreement was signed reducing the maximum time on duty again and increasing paid holidays from eight to twelve days a year. The committee to inquire into the effects of working conditions of London busmen, also chaired by John (now Sir John) Forster, and including two union officials along with officers of the board and members of the Medical Research Council, published its final report on 5 November 1939. It found 'in the years 1933-35 some relative excess of gastric illness . . . among London omnibus workers at ages up to 49', but between 1931 and 1938 'the general level of sickness—that is from all causes of illness—had not materially changed amongst the omnibus conductors, and has probably slightly improved amongst the drivers'.<sup>80</sup> It follows that the London busmen's confident assertion that the 'Speed Agreement'<sup>81</sup> in 1932 had damaged their health by increasing the strain of their work had not been substantiated.

The growth of road haulage between the wars was even more impressive than that of passenger transport by buses and coaches. Lorries and vans had three advantages over the railways in the handling of goods traffic. They were 'particularly suitable for short-distance and cross-country journeys and for the conveyance of small consignments of merchandise'. Secondly, 'Not only were their costs falling rapidly relatively to those of rail, but they also based their charges on costs of operation whereas the railways generally did not.'<sup>82</sup> Thirdly, the operators were not limited by an elaborate set of trade union agreements in the payment and deployment of their staff, as were the railway companies. The National Joint Council for Commercial Road Transport which had collapsed in 1920 had been succeeded by district agreements of varying coverage and authority, many of which had become defunct during the Depression. The Road Traffic Acts of 1930 and 1933 had provided 'statutory limitations on the hours a driver might spend at the wheel and established a system of licensing', which could be used to enforce these limitations and to regulate pay.

The problems of enforcement, however, remained. The industry was split up into a large number of firms, many of them small in size. The employers were individualistic in their attitude; competition between them was fierce, and undercutting, the payment of low wages and the systematic evasion of regulations common practice. The men, amongst whom trade union membership and organisation were poor, connived at this to retain their jobs, to earn a bribe for keeping their mouths shut or simply for their own convenience when,

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Labour, *The Health of Central London Busmen* (1939).

<sup>81</sup> See Clegg, *History*, 524-5.

<sup>82</sup> D. H. Aldcroft, *The Inter-war Economy* (London, Batsford, 1970), 216.



by driving excessive hours and breaking the speed limit, they could get home earlier.<sup>83</sup>

Bevin's intention in road haulage, as with company bus and coach operators, was to set up a national joint council. Realizing that the employers were most unlikely to agree to participate in such a council, he approached the Minister of Labour to take the initiative, and on 29 December 1933 reported to his executive that the minister had appointed a committee with Leggett in the chair and Bevin among the members 'to assist the Ministry in the establishment of joint machinery for the settlement of working conditions in the Commercial Road Transport Industry'. By April 1934 a constitution had been agreed for a National Joint Conciliation Board for the Road Motor Transport Industry (Goods), with Sir Richard Redmayne (formerly chief inspector of mines) as independent chairman, and the council proceeded to consider how to regulate wages and especially hours of work. In July a draft agreement prepared by a subcommittee was accepted by the council with the intention that it should operate on 1 October, the date on which the 1933 Act was to take effect. However, the Road Haulage Association asked for a postponement, and at a meeting of the conciliation board on 19 September, after the workers' side of the board had 'challenged a section of the Employers' Side with pursuing wrecking tactics', it was agreed that, 'as certain Area Boards had not been established', the date of operation should be postponed to 1 January 1935. Meanwhile the council urged that all the area joint boards, which were essential to the administration of the agreement, be set up 'at the earliest possible moment'.<sup>84</sup> But Bevin realized that more than this was needed to enforce the agreement. In his report for the third quarter of the year he wrote: 'If anyone imagines that every employer is going to pay the wages under the Report and all we have to do is to collect the contributions of the men, he is living in a fool's paradise. I do beg of you, when reporting to your Area Committees, to hammer this home with every possible force.' Over the next year Bevin's mood varied widely between optimism and pessimism. In December 1934 he reported that the postponement 'had been used by what is termed the "Employers' Co-ordinating Committee" to try to smash the Report. . . . My only regret is that the Section is not strong enough to enable us to hand in notices and enforce the Report.'<sup>85</sup> By contrast, in

<sup>83</sup> Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin* (3 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1960, 1967, 1983), 544-5.

<sup>84</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, General Executive Council, *Minutes* (17 Sept. 1934).

<sup>85</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *General Secretary's Fourth Quarterly Report* (1934).

his next quarterly report he claimed 'wonderful progress in membership, and on the whole the difficulties in regard to the NJCB appear to be straightening themselves out'.<sup>86</sup> In the next quarter, however, he told his executive that the employers were 'the most dishonest set of people it has ever been my lot to deal with'.<sup>87</sup> By the end of 1935 he was putting his hopes on amending the Acts to give 'quicker and more effective means for the enforcement of the wages; to give increased powers to the Commissioners; and to remove the cumbersome and dilatory procedure for which the Act now provides'. In addition, he wanted 'greater penalties for the employers where it is proved that they are the cause of violating the law'.<sup>88</sup> This approach brought results. On 20 August 1936 he was able to tell the executive that the government had appointed an inquiry, chaired by Sir James Baillie, to 'examine the present position with regard to the regulation of wages and conditions of service of persons employed in connection with the carriage of goods by road'.

The committee's report, published in May 1937, led to the Road Haulage Wages Act 1938. The Act set up a central wages board with representatives of both sides of the industry and independent members, one of whom was to be the chairman, and area boards (one for Scotland—where the Scottish Horse and Motormen's Association was the major union—and one for each of the ten traffic areas in England and Wales). The job of the central board was to prepare proposals for the remuneration of road-haulage workers employed by the hauliers working exclusively for hire or reward (A licencees) and by hauliers working partly for others but also carrying their own goods (B licencees). Having consulted the area boards and 'all persons affected thereby' about their proposals, and amended them if necessary, the board was to submit them to the minister, who might refer them back, which would lead to another round of consultations. Otherwise the minister had to embody the proposals in an order, making them legally enforceable. Road-haulage workers whose employers carried their own goods exclusively (C licencees) were entitled to complain either directly or through their unions to the minister that their remuneration was unfair. Subject to various qualifications, such as the complaint not being 'frivolous or vexatious', the minister was to refer it to the Industrial Court, which was given guide-lines as to what remuneration was to be considered fair. If the court decided that the remuneration in question was unfair, it was to fix fair remuneration, which also became legally enforceable.

The conciliation board machinery was still in existence. In March

<sup>86</sup> *First Quarterly Report (1935)*.

<sup>87</sup> *Second Quarterly Report (1935)*.

<sup>88</sup> *Fourth Quarterly Report (1935)*.

1938 a claim for a wage increase on behalf of road-haulage workers in the London area, which had been rejected by the London employers, was referred to the national board. At that stage the employers wanted to leave the matter until the new legislation was in operation. The union refused on the grounds that it might entail waiting for eighteen months, and suggested arbitration. The employers would not agree to that, but appeared to be willing to discuss a general wage-claim. However, one of the three employers' associations represented on the board, the Associated Road Operators, had second thoughts, and the other two decided that they could not proceed. Deadlock was reached, and Bevin gave fourteen days' notice of a national strike, which, he said in his report for the first quarter of the year, 'made the Employers reflect'. On 22 March a settlement was reported to the union executive. Adult men were to receive a pay increase of 15p a week, and youths an increase of 10p a week. The three employers' associations pledged themselves to recommend the agreement to their members. Complaints about the operation of the forty-eight-hour working week were to be discussed by the board, and, if no agreement was reached, to be referred to the chairman, Sir Richard Redmayne, for decision.

It is not certain what the response to the strike call would have been in an industry in which union membership was still modest.<sup>89</sup> The union executive had approved the issue of instructions to its members in docks, wharves, and warehouses not to load road-haulage vehicles; and an approach had been made to the Railwaymen and other unions to issue similar instructions. These moves would have helped to reinforce the impact of a strike, but the employers had other reasons besides the threat of a stoppage to persuade them to settle. Many of them would have been willing to improve the pay and conditions of their employees provided they knew that their competitors would not undercut them by lower pay and worse conditions. The knowledge that legislation was before Parliament to give them that assurance may have made the costs of a strike seem unacceptable to them, and, indeed, also to those hauliers who were not averse to undercutting.

Industrial relations were unusually quiet during these years in another section of the transport industry where the major union was the Transport and General Workers—the docks. The only major strikes were in Glasgow where the dockers were organized by the breakaway Scottish Transport and General Workers' Union which, despite its title, was pretty well confined to dockers. Besides these two unions, the National Joint Council for Dock Labour included the General and

<sup>89</sup> On 26 May 1938 Bevin told his executive: 'We ought to have a membership of 200,000 among Commercial Road Transport workers, whereas at the moment it is in the region of 70,000.'

Municipal Workers' Union, with membership in the North-east ports, and the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers, whose members were mainly specialist workers in London, although they included some dockers in Hull. In September 1934 the council established the 'principle of restoration' of the wage cuts made during the Depression, and, as in many other industries, it was applied in stages. In his report for the third quarter of 1935 Bevin wrote that the employers had promised to give an answer to the claim for full restoration on 30 September, and if it was 'unfavourable, I see no alternative but to tender notices'. However, agreement was reached. The balance due to time-workers was paid from 6 January 1936, whereas piece-workers had a further partial restoration on that date, with their final stage on 6 April. The following year the union side of the council put in a claim for an increase of 20p a day—almost 30 per cent on the existing daily rate of 65p in the major ports. Bevin pointed out to his members the difficulty of obtaining 20p 'in one advance';<sup>90</sup> and in August the union side accepted an increase of 5p a day, which, at nearly 8 per cent in the major ports, and just over that in the minor ports (where the daily rate was 60p), was above the level of settlements in most other industries at that time.

In the ports themselves the local officers of Bevin's union were boosting the earnings of their members by schemes of registration which were intended to squeeze the margin of casual workers who competed for dock work. In 1925 Bevin had persuaded the Ministry of Labour that unemployed registered dock workers should not be required to look for work outside the docks, thus exempting them from the clause in the regulations requiring claimants for unemployment benefit to show that they were 'genuinely seeking work'. Consequently registered dockers could rely on receiving unemployment benefit for those days on which there was no work for them on the docks. Registration schemes increased in number following 'the establishment of the Standing Advisory Committee of the Port Transport Industry in 1931. Herein representatives of the employers' National Council and the executive of the Transport and General Workers' Union, came together in order to revive and improve local registration agreements.'<sup>91</sup> 'Registration, union organization, and the growing distaste of employers for casual hiring had, in conjunction, gradually converted docking from an open to a closed occupation.' There was 'a considerable margin of unregistered labour—partly, but by no means wholly composed of non-unionists—

<sup>90</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *General Secretary's Second Quarterly Report* (1937).

<sup>91</sup> Gordon Phillips and Noel Whiteside, *Casual Labour* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 215. In 1930 there were twenty-eight ports with registers, but many of them were 'in a state of disrepair'. By 1937 there were thirty-four 'active schemes' (*ibid.* 214-15).



which could readily be joined by newcomers'; but the unregistered dockers 'no longer threatened the livelihood and status' of those on the register. The labour force on the docks was also becoming increasingly middle-aged. 'The young were recruited sparingly with increased preference for dockers' sons.'<sup>92</sup>

However, there could be drawbacks for union members in these apparently beneficial arrangements. Jack Jones, later general secretary of the union, was the son of a Liverpool docker. He started work on the Liverpool docks in the early thirties, and fell foul of Harry Pugh, the local secretary of the union, who considered the class for dockers that Jones arranged through the Workers' Educational Association for Sunday evenings to be 'a rank-and-file movement'. 'A cosy relationship between union officialdom and employers led to slackness in observing agreements and the emergence of non-unionism in some parts of the port. Combined with ugly, indeed alarming evidence of bullying and dictatorialness in union affairs, the atmosphere was not encouraging to an earnest young trade unionist like me.' Jones also alleged that there was evidence of ballot-rigging in union elections, and of the bribing of foremen by dockers in order to get good jobs.<sup>93</sup>

There were occasional signs of rank-and-file unrest elsewhere in the docks. In his report for the second quarter of 1934 Bevin wrote in relation to a dispute at Hay's Wharf in London that 'Immediately unofficial disputes crop up . . . resolutions are received urging the Union to make the dispute an official one, and they proceed on the assumption that the Executive and the Union are always wrong.' On 17 September 1934 the executive noted that 'certain disruptive elements were involved' in unrest among dockers employed by the Manchester Ship Canal, where stoppages were 'taking place against the advice of, or without reference to, the Union on practically every issue arising'. Three members were expelled as a result of an inquiry by the union, and therefore lost their jobs, but they were re-employed the following year, after a legal case led to their reinstatement in the union in return for the 'withdrawal of all charges of unfairness against the Union and its Officials'.<sup>94</sup>

The most serious dock strikes of the period, however, were in Glasgow, where the Scottish Transport and General Workers, like the Stevedores in London, would have nothing to do with registration. In Glasgow 'union organisation alone was strong enough to afford preference of employment to members' and 'union officers followed the practice of limiting recruitment in order to alleviate the problem of

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 209-10.

<sup>93</sup> J. L. (Jack) Jones, *Union Man* (London, Collins, 1986) 35-50.

<sup>94</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, General Executive Council, *Minutes* (19 Aug. 1935).

underemployment'. Moreover, the Glasgow dockers 'had reason to fear that [registration] would mean a stricter administration of unemployment relief on the Clyde'.<sup>95</sup> With their own union executive on hand, the Glasgow dockers were better placed than most members of the Transport and General Workers both to control official union actions and to take the law into their own hands without fear of retribution. 'In 1935 . . . a departmental conciliation officer [of the Ministry of Labour] reported that 77 different stoppages had occurred on the Glasgow waterside during the year.'<sup>96</sup> In November the employers locked them all out in retaliation. After three days the dockers returned to work, having given an undertaking to observe the national agreement in the future. Things were no better in 1936 when in October the dockers stopped the port in sympathy with thirty-eight men who had asked for an increase of 3½p an hour for unloading phosphates and were offered 1¾p; and in protest against the threat of another lockout on account of repeated stoppages. At the end of a week they followed their union's advice by voting for a return to work. In March 1939 the port was again closed for a week in protest against a new agreement.

Bevin had not abandoned his ambition to put an end to casual employment in the docks by replacing employment for a 'turn' of half a day with employment by the week. He restarted discussions with the employers on the subject in 1937, and on 3 February 1938 he told his executive that success would depend 'upon the receipt of a Government grant for a period of at least 10 years in lieu of the present Unemployment Benefit'. Whether the dockers themselves would have welcomed the change any more warmly than they did when it was finally introduced thirty years later was not put to the test, but at least a national conference of their delegates decided on 17 June that 'most consideration should be given to the possibility of introducing forthwith, schemes of decasualisation in separate ports pending completion of negotiations on the full question'.

Industrial relations in shipping were even quieter than on the docks. The corrupt and dictatorial regime of Havelock Wilson in the National Union of Seamen had come to an end with his death in 1929, but under his successor, W. R. Spence, the union continued his policy of maintaining close relations with the employers in return for their closed-shop agreement. Their joint industrial council, the National Maritime Board—in which unions of ships' officers and engineers were also represented—negotiated a restoration of their £1.50 a month pay cut in four stages spread over 1935 to 1937, and in 1938 agreed to an advance of 75p a month (5 per cent). Otherwise, little was heard of them.

<sup>95</sup> Phillips and Whiteside, 25-6.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 227.

*Other Private Industries*

This chapter has so far dealt with industrial relations in only a selection of the more important industries in the country, and—apart from road passenger transport with its municipal transport undertakings and the London Passenger Transport Board—only with private industries. Some other private industries deserve a mention, two of them organized by the Transport and General Workers' Union.

The flour-milling industry probably received a disproportionate share of Bevin's time, for he served from 1934 to 1937 as chairman of its joint industrial council. He was especially proud of the achievements of the council on behalf of 'his' members in the industry, where he had the advantage of an unusually warm relationship with several of the leading employers. In 1927 the council introduced a forty-four-hour week, many years ahead of most other industries; and in 1937, as chairman, he persuaded the employers to reduce the working week of shift workers to forty-two hours.

To meet the problem of short-time working, the employers agreed to guarantee the fixed rate of wages even for the man on short time, by making up the difference between his unemployment benefit and the sum he would have received for a normal week's work. This was an innovation of which Bevin was proud and which he defended with vigour and success when the Ministry of Labour questioned the practice under the Unemployment Insurance Act.<sup>97</sup>

Another section of the Transport and General Workers' Union catered for men employed in the fishing industry. In 1934 there was no formal machinery of negotiation for them, but in June 1935 Bevin was able to report:

Things were brought to a head by the employers at Hull . . . cutting the wages of certain fishermen. This led to a strike . . . Many of those involved in the dispute were not in compliance, but we supported them . . . The union support, backed by public support, surprised both the local politicians, the Press and the Government itself, and eventually the Government set up a Court of Inquiry. . . . The result was the establishment of a Conciliation Board. I am happy to say . . . the principle is already extending. In Lowestoft for instance, we have made substantial progress in membership and, in addition, have secured the setting up of a local joint board.<sup>98</sup>

According to the report of the court of inquiry, which was chaired by Sir James Baillie (another regular choice for such posts), the reduction in pay was due to the decision of the Fishing Vessel Owners' Association to reduce the price of cod-liver oil which was regarded 'as the perquisite of the crew'; but, said the court, 'it appeared to us that a more fundamental

<sup>97</sup> Bullock, 605.

<sup>98</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *General Secretary's Second Quarterly Report* (1935).

cause of difficulty . . . which must be removed if the dispute was to be allayed' was that the Transport and General Workers' Union 'had been unable to obtain access to the Owners Association for the purpose of discussing the matter before the stoppage'; and, although other unions were recognized by the owners, the Transport and General Workers 'had the greatest membership among deck-hands and cooks'. So the court adjourned to explore the possibility of setting up a conciliation board. The exploration was successful; a board was established which included all the unions. The sitting was resumed; an agreement on the cod-liver oil issue was announced; and the court adjourned *sine die*.<sup>99</sup>

The most important food-producing industry was, of course, agriculture, with about 750,000 employees. The industry had never been able to sustain voluntary collective bargaining on an extensive scale over any considerable period of time. At the time agricultural wages were settled, under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924, by joint county agricultural wages committees, each with three independent members one of whom was chairman. There was also a Central Agricultural Wages Board, with a similar structure, which had no power to fix pay except where a committee failed to do so, but issued the orders needed to make the county rates obligatory on the farmers. The separate Scottish Farm Workers' Union had secured the exclusion of Scotland from the 1924 Act, because it believed that it could manage without it. It found that it could not, and in 1937 an Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act established a similar set of district boards and a central board in Scotland. There were forty-seven county committees in England and Wales, some of them covering more than one county. In 1934, twenty-eight of them submitted proposed increases to the central board, which, of course, confirmed them all. In 1935 the number was thirty-four, and in 1936 thirty-six; in 1937 it rose to forty-five, but fell to twenty-nine in 1938, and was down to six for the first eight months of 1939.

According to the National Union of Agricultural Workers—which was the main union in the industry in England and Wales, although the Transport and General Workers' agricultural section also had members, and representatives on the central board and some county committees—the median weekly rate in 1933 was £1.50-£1.55, which applied in twenty of the areas covered by the county committees; £1.55-£1.60 in 1936 (also applying in twenty areas); and £1.70-£1.75 in February 1938 (nineteen areas).<sup>100</sup> This 13 per cent increase from 1933 to 1938 was

<sup>99</sup> Cmd. 4917 (1935). The board was the Conciliation Board for the Trawling Industry at Hull, and the other unions were the General and Municipal Workers and the Seamen.

<sup>100</sup> *Landworker* (Mar. 1938).



ahead of the change in the general index of weekly wage rates, which was up by just over 10 per cent from December 1933 to December 1938. Nevertheless, the union found the wage-fixing machinery unsatisfactory, because effective power rested with the independent members, and

Out of 140 such appointed persons, only two or three are members of the working class or are likely to have not only sympathy for the workers but also a clear understanding of their conditions . . . in most cases they are professors, landowners, doctors, Army men, and other professional men.

As each committee is a law unto itself, all kinds of wages anomalies appear, and men doing the same work in the same county where there are two committees (as in Lincolnshire) will get [15p] difference in their minimum rate, for which there is absolutely no reason whatsoever.<sup>101</sup>

The union wished to see the restoration of the power given to the central board by the Corn Production Act 1917 to fix a national minimum rate. Another complaint of the union, which could have been removed only by a massive increase in the number of wages inspectors, was the extent of underpayment. In the year up to 30 September 1937 the inspectorate chose two representative areas (not 'specially bad' areas) for intensive inspection to estimate the extent of the problem.<sup>102</sup> There was also the perennial problem of the 'tied' cottage—a house owned by the farmer, and let to the worker on a service tenancy, which meant that if the worker was dismissed, his family and possessions could be put out into the road to free the house for his replacement.

The union did not confine its membership to farmworkers. Since many farmworkers got jobs as county roadmen in rural areas, they were regarded as within the union's scope, and were recognized, along with the two general unions and the Public Employees, to represent roadworkers in negotiations with some county councils. A further instance of recognition for voluntary collective bargaining came in October 1937 when the Sugar Beet Corporation recognized a committee of the Agricultural Workers and the two general unions to negotiate on behalf of the workers in its eighteen factories.

Another food industry was made subject to statutory wage regulation in 1939 for a novel reason. The baking industry was organized mainly by the Operative Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Workers in England and Wales, and by the Scottish Bakers, Confectioners and Bakery Workers in Scotland. A network of local and district agreements covered most of the country, and wages and conditions of work were not unduly

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* May 1938.

<sup>102</sup> They were the Looe district in Cornwall, and parts of Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire. In the first, 106 farms were visited, and forty-one out of the 162 workers were found to be underpaid; in the second, the figure was seventy-six out of 249 (*ibid.* (Nov. 1938)).

depressed. This was not the sort of industry for which the Trade Board Acts had been intended. However, at the 1934 Trades Union Congress the Scottish Bakers' secretary complained that

In the 1933 agreement that was arrived at between the bakers in Inverness and the employers, it was laid down that the earliest time for starting work for the men engaged in that trade would be 4 o'clock, and this particular firm accepted that agreement. Some months later they came along to their men and, without any warning, intimated to them that they were to start work at midnight. . . . The Conciliation Department of the Ministry of Labour was brought in, and the employer refused to discuss it. . . . Perhaps I should explain that night baking is a thing hardly known outside Glasgow. We have constantly and consistently opposed any introduction of it.<sup>103</sup>

The men were called out on strike, but the firm replaced them with non-unionists, and the union was defeated.

The War Office had a contract with the firm, which was therefore a government contractor, bound under the Fair Wages Resolution of 1909 'to pay rates of wages and observe hours of labour not less favourable than those commonly recognised by employers and trade societies (or in the absence of such recognised wages and hours, those which in practice prevail among good employers) in the trade or district where the work is carried out'; and despite union representations, it remained on the list of government contractors. Government departments differed from the unions and the Trades Union Congress over the Fair Wages Resolution. The unions wanted national agreements, where they existed, to be taken as the criteria of fair pay. The departments maintained that district practice must be the test, and that, by that test, the complaint of the Scottish Bakers could not be sustained. Eventually, in 1937, the Minister of Labour appointed a committee, chaired by Sir David Ross (another regular), to inquire into the desirability of redrafting the resolution. Meanwhile, another committee had been asked to report on night baking. It proposed that the practice be controlled by law, and that 'the best means of control was not through specific legislation but through Trade Boards'.<sup>104</sup> In fact both methods were employed. The Baking Industry (Hours of Labour) Act was passed in 1938, to come into force in 1940. Meanwhile, two Baking Trade Boards were established in 1939, one for England and Wales, the other for Scotland. Apparently, 'it was hoped that' by the time the Act came into operation 'the new Trade Boards would be regulating night work so successfully that the Act would not be needed. The Government's

<sup>103</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1934) 352-3.

<sup>104</sup> F. J. Bayliss, *British Wages Council* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) 36.

strongest argument in favour of this solution was that the employers and the trade unions were in favour of it.<sup>105</sup>

The wishes of unions and employers were paramount in the setting-up of three other trade boards at this time. Following a series of strikes in some of the main rubber manufacturing plants in 1935-6, the two general unions had secured recognition from several companies. In 1938 there were discussions over setting up a national joint council. The unions formed the impression that the employers 'would be willing to agree . . . if they could first obtain the protection of a Trade Board'.<sup>106</sup> A joint approach was made to the ministry. It appeared that there would be an advantage in setting up two boards, one for rubber manufacturing and the other for rubber reclamation. When the two boards were appointed in 1939,

the Minister stated explicitly that they were being established at the request of the employers and trade unions. In furniture making the organised employers were more eager for a Board than the unions. At a conference in 1938 the unions refused to join the employers' association in a request to the Minister for a Board, but when the employers published the results of their own inquiry into the furniture trade in London, which showed that in cabinet-making over 96 per cent of the workers were receiving less than the minimum rates agreed with the union, the Minister himself called a conference to discuss the setting up of a Board. The main union in the trade [the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association] withdrew its opposition and the Board was set up.<sup>107</sup>

In general, large firms, unless they were, like the major car producers Austin and Morris, hostile to trade unions—usually played a prominent part in the development of collective bargaining in their industries, as did Dunlop in rubber, Rowntree and Cadbury in food manufacturing, and Unilever in several industries. It was to their advantage to make sure that their competitors were subject to the agreements they were applying in their own plants. In 1936, however, ICI withdrew from the Chemical and Allied Employers' Association and the Chemical Joint Industrial Council. When ICI was established in 1927, Richard Lloyd Roberts, a former official of the Ministry of Labour who had been labour manager for Brunner Mond, was appointed head of a central labour department for the new company. He 'helped to forge the policy of security of earnings, stability of employment and joint consultation which was to serve as a pattern to other firms'.<sup>108</sup> By the mid-thirties he was finding the agreements of the joint industrial council to be a restriction on the

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> H. A. Clegg, *General Union* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), 242.

<sup>107</sup> Bayliss, 35-6.

<sup>108</sup> M. M. Niven, *Personnel Management 1913-1963* (London: Institute of Personnel Management 1967), 80.

development of this policy. In 1938 he negotiated a separate agreement with twenty-three unions representing ICI employees.

#### *White-Collar Unions in Private Industry*

Before turning to the public sector, in which white-collar unionism was well developed, we shall consider white-collar unions in private industry. Perhaps the strongest of them all was the Railway Clerks' Association, whose activities in this period have already been described, since the union negotiated along with the other railway unions through a common procedure. Such an arrangement was unusual.

It is doubtful whether shop assistants should be classified as white-collar workers. If they are—as they will be in this book—then the second most powerful white-collar union at the time was probably the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, whose strength lay in the co-operative societies. In 1937 it had almost 160,000 members, nearly all of them employed by co-operative societies. The union's annual report for 1934 noted that 'The lightened burden of dispute benefit in recent years is due chiefly to the operation of the National Co-operative Conciliation Board.' The job of the board was to settle disputes between the union and individual co-operative retail societies, not to negotiate national agreements for all the retail societies. Settlements with individual societies provided 'restoration of cuts or direct increases' from 1934 onwards, and 'continued at a steady pace'. Another benefit to the employees of co-operatives was the increasing number of them covered by superannuation schemes. By 1938, these schemes included 280,000 out of 347,000 employees.<sup>109</sup> The Co-operative Wholesale Society had refused to come within the jurisdiction of the conciliation board when it was established; and by 1937 the union 'had been pressing for both a speedier method of negotiations with the Society, and for conciliation in the event of failure to agree. At the end of 1937 the pattern of conciliation in the retail and wholesale movement was completed by an agreement between the Society and a committee of Unions with Co-operative membership, set up by the TUC',<sup>110</sup> which provided for the settlement of disputes in a manner similar to that of the retail societies' agreement.

The other main union in distribution was the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, with nearly 60,000 members in 1937. However, this figure exaggerates the extent of union organization in private retailing at the time, for a fair proportion of

<sup>109</sup> William Richardson, *A Union of Many Trades* (Manchester, USDAW, 1979), 117-19, 123.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 124.



the union's members were employed in co-operative societies. By 1935 the union 'and a number of employers in the departmental store and multiple shop sections, wanted to develop voluntary collective bargaining, and the Minister was willing to use his influence to encourage others to join them'.<sup>111</sup> Over the next two years his discussions with the two sides led to the formation of a joint subcommittee to draw up a scheme for the introduction of collective bargaining throughout retail distribution. Both sides wanted to avoid the imposition of trade boards, so their proposal was for separate joint committees for the different branches of retailing to propose changes in wage rates, with a national council authorized to ratify their proposals, which would then be legally enforceable.

In the mean time the union had been developing voluntary collective bargaining. Its first agreement with a grocery multiple was signed in May 1936 and by November 1937 it had a national agreement with the United Kingdom Association of Multiple Shop Proprietors (Grocery and Provisions) covering almost 100,000 employees; followed in 1938 by agreements with the multiple footwear and tailoring associations. 'This development of voluntary negotiations itself depended on the expectation that statutory wage regulation would follow.'<sup>112</sup> However, the minister's view was that the power to fix statutory minimum wages should be vested in the joint committees for the various branches of retailing, and in February 1939 the subcommittee revised its proposals accordingly. What was now proposed was a number of trade boards. The proposal faced the difficulty that there were doubts as to the legality of setting up trade boards in service trades, which had not been resolved by the time war broke out. The matter was therefore shelved for the time being.

A third powerful white-collar union in private industry was the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen with 14,000 members in 1937, which had been recognized by the Engineering Employers' Federation since 1924, although it was not yet recognised by the Shipbuilding Employers. However, the Draughtsmen did not negotiate their salaries with the Engineering Employers' Federation. They settled rates of minimum salaries for themselves, and instructed their members not to work for less.

In the second half of the nineteen-thirties the Association was able to record a steady upward movement in wages. From 1935 onwards the average wage of men thirty years of age and over rose in each successive year. In 1937 the Representative Council . . . decided to increase the Association's minimum rate

<sup>111</sup> Bayliss, 37.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 39-40.

for men aged twenty-five years and over from £5 to [£5.50] per week outside the London area, and from [£5.50] to £6 inside London.<sup>113</sup>

In 1938 a London branch proposed that the union ask the engineering employers to recognize these minimum rates. The executive opposed the move on the grounds that it would be 'dangerous to the standing of the Association'.<sup>114</sup> In the same year the union began to publish minimum rates for tracers—women working in junior positions in the drawing-offices—who were organized in a separate section of the union.

Hours of work and overtime were also controlled by the union. In 1935, 'for the first time in a number of years, a group of A.E.S.D. members were involved in a strike'. They demanded of their employer, a firm at Seaham, 'that payment should be made for all overtime and that the amount of overtime should be reduced', and that three members who had been dismissed for refusing to work overtime should be reinstated. Eventually the firm conceded.<sup>115</sup> In the same year negotiations with the engineering employers in Derby secured a reduction in the working week to forty-one hours.<sup>116</sup> In 1937 a questionnaire showed that over half the members were working a 40½-hour week or less.<sup>117</sup> Apprentice draughtsmen were selected from general-engineering apprentices to spend the last years of their apprenticeships in the drawing-office. In January 1938, following the recognition of the craft unions to negotiate on behalf of engineering apprentices, the engineering employers also recognized the Draughtsmen's Association to deal with 'questions affecting apprentices and young persons in drawing and tracing offices'.

Although the National Union of Clerks and Administrative Workers had been recognized by the engineering employers in 1920, and the Draughtsmen's Association in 1924, this was done for the purpose of raising issues through the procedure, and not for national negotiations over pay and hours of work. 'It remained the policy of the Federation that the terms and conditions of staff workers were a matter for management and their staff to deal with, and members were sensitive about this.'<sup>118</sup> No union had been recognized to represent foremen for any purpose, and the federation had long ago given its support to a Foremen's Mutual Benefit Association 'to compensate non-union foremen for the lack of union benefits'.<sup>119</sup> However, a union for

<sup>113</sup> James E. Mortimer, *A History of the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen* (London: Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, 1960), 182.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 183.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* 180.

<sup>118</sup> Wigham, 154.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 65. During the 1914-18 war the Foremen's Mutual Benefit Association had become the Foremen and Staff Mutual Benefit Association.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 179-80.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 183.

foremen had existed for some years—the National Foremen's Association (Engineering and Allied Trades) which had over 1,600 members in 1937. By that time the union had been recognized by London Transport to represent supervisory grades in its railway- and road-transport undertakings, and by several local-authority passenger-transport undertakings to represent their workshop and garage foremen; and had even had dealings with one federated engineering company, GEC, where it represented rate-fixers in pay negotiations in 1935.

In June 1939 the National Union of Clerks and Administrative Workers drew up a national scale of salaries for clerical staff and began to present it to individual engineering companies 'in every part of the country', but not much had been achieved by the time war broke out. The union's major success in the thirties lay elsewhere. By 1935 it had set up three branches among the clerical staff of the Amalgamated Anthracite Collieries Combine in South Wales, and early that year it submitted a claim for increases in salaries and overtime pay, and other concessions. When the company dismissed one of the branch secretaries concerned, the union called the members of his branch out on strike, and arranged stay-in strikes at other offices of the combine. The miners who were consequently laid off 'co-operated by besieging the office *en masse* for their unemployment cards; and at last the company capitulated and the strike ended with substantial concessions to the Union'.<sup>120</sup>

In the following year, by contrast, another strike led to the exclusion of the union from the steel industry. Since 1920 there had been an arrangement with the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation that the Clerks and Administrative Workers should recruit clerical workers in steel and affiliate in respect of these members to the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association, which in all other respects was the Confederation under another name. In 1936 the union submitted a claim for salary increases and improved conditions to Colville's in Scotland, but the firm refused to deal with it. With the consent of the steel union, the Clerks and Administrative Workers called their members out on strike. 'The company then agreed to the establishment of a committee consisting of representatives of the Iron and Steel Trades Employers' Association, of BISAFTA (but not the CAWU) and of the employers concerned. The committee was to examine the whole situation created by the strike and to evolve a procedure for dealing with future staff disputes at Colvilles.'<sup>121</sup> The outcome was that the steel union was recognized to represent clerical workers at Colville's, and terminated its agreement with the Clerks and Administrative Workers,

<sup>120</sup> F. Hughes, *By Hand and Brain* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), 102.

<sup>121</sup> G. S. Bain, *The Growth of White-Collar Unionism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 164-5.

taking over most of its clerical membership in the industry. 'It seems likely . . . that BISAFTA's change of attitude was brought about by the realization that the employers were more prepared to recognize it for staff workers than the CAWU.'<sup>122</sup> One other strike involving the union deserves a mention. A clerk in an aircraft factory in Dumbarton was dismissed for laughing, 'whereupon the whole of the organised clerical staff . . . ceased work, with the result that the works had to be closed'.<sup>123</sup> A few days later he was reinstated and the strike was called off.

In the printing industry the National Union of Journalists had been recognized by the Newspaper Proprietors' Association and the Newspaper Society since 1918. In 1919 the association had recognized the Paper Workers to represent clerical staff, but for many years the Newspaper Society would not recognize any union to represent clerical employees. In 1938 the Operative Printers and Assistants put in strike notices to several provincial newspaper houses. They had few clerical members in the provinces, but were prepared to call out their clerical members in London and also their members working in production. The Newspaper Society told the union that the weekly newspaper proprietors were not prepared to recognize them to represent clerical staff, but offered to negotiate an agreement covering daily newspaper proprietors; and an agreement was signed in December 1938. Had the employers refused any concession, the Operative Printers and Assistants 'would undoubtedly have called for and received the support of the other manual workers' unions in the industry through the P[rinting and] K[indred] T[rades] F[ederation]. Faced with such pressure, the Newspaper Society could do little but give way.'<sup>124</sup>

Another small but important white-collar union was the British Air Line Pilots' Association, founded in May 1937 because of the concern of its members about pay and about flying conditions on some of the routes covered by Imperial Airways. In September the association wrote to the management suggesting the suspension of the Budapest service, which had been recently introduced and which it considered to be particularly hazardous. In October Imperial Airways dismissed seven pilots, including the chairman and vice-chairman of the association, who had both signed the letter. A Conservative Member of Parliament, who was also the vice-president of the association, raised the matter in the House of Commons, and a committee of inquiry was set up with Lord Cadman as chairman. Its report on the company was damning. The committee was 'profoundly dissatisfied in regard to . . . its dealing with its staff and its internal management', and considered that 'the

<sup>122</sup> Bain, *The Growth of White-Collar Unionism*, 165.

<sup>124</sup> Bain, 160-1.

<sup>123</sup> Hughes, 110.



management . . . has been defective in other respects'. It criticized the managing director, and proposed the appointment of a full-time chairman of the board. It was also inclined to think that 'the formation of a Council on the "Whitley method" . . . would have advantages'.<sup>125</sup> It did not assert that the dismissed pilots had been victimized, but 'probably had serious doubts as to whether the dismissals were justified'.<sup>126</sup> In 1938 a ballot was held to determine whether the pilots wished to be represented by the association or by 'domestic committees'. The association was chosen, and recognized by the company, although formal negotiating machinery was not established until after the war when the airlines were nationalized.

### *Local-Government Services*

In 1934 the local authorities were responsible for by far the largest group of public employees in the country. The single largest service was 'non-trading', so called to distinguish it from the trading services: road passenger transport (whose collective bargaining arrangements have already been described), electricity supply, gas supply, and water supply, in which local-authority representatives negotiated along with representatives of private companies in their dealings with the unions. In addition, the counties and county boroughs were the local education authorities, responsible for the state schools and their staffs, with their own negotiating arrangements. They were also responsible for the public hospital services which had been transferred from the Poor Law authorities to the county and county borough councils under an Act passed in 1929.

The pay and conditions of service of manual workers in the non-trading services were settled in the main by provincial joint industrial councils, whose strength lay in the industrial towns and the county boroughs. For the most part, the county councils—with the exception of the London County Council—held aloof. The function of the National Joint Industrial Council for Non-Trading Services (Manual Workers) in England and Wales—there was a separate council in Scotland—was to settle disputes in which the two sides of a provincial council could not reach agreement. Because of this division of responsibilities there was no general reduction in pay during the Depression, despite a Ministry of Health circular which 'left the local authorities in no doubt as to the

<sup>125</sup> Cmnd. 105 (1938). The report in 1917 of the Committee on Relations between Employers and Employed chaired by J. H. Whitley (Col. 8606) had recommended the establishment of 'Joint Industrial Councils in all well-organised industries', and these councils were therefore often called 'Whitley councils'.

<sup>126</sup> A. N. J. Blain, *Pilots and Management* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), 271.

government's view of the need for economy in wage-bills'.<sup>127</sup> Most, although not all, authorities made varying wage cuts, and those that had made cuts were later responsive to pleas for restoration. Charles Dukes, general secretary of the General and Municipal Workers, was able to tell his union's conference in 1934 that there had 'now been practically complete restoration'. There followed negotiations for wage increases, which, Dukes told his 1938 conference, had been successful in every provincial council. The London employers, however, had persuaded the unions to include a clause in their agreement for an advance, which was signed in 1936, that it should not be reopened except in 'unforeseen and abnormal circumstances', and, when the unions submitted a further claim in 1939, the London employers insisted that this requirement had not been met. The unions appealed to the national council, which agreed with the London employers but recommended that the claim should be reconsidered in view of the wage increases negotiated by the other provincial councils since 1936. The claim had not been settled by the time war broke out.

Because most county councils were not affiliated to the provincial joint councils, and the County Councils' Association was not a member of the employers' side of the national council, these negotiations had little direct effect on the pay of county-council employees, except in London, Lancashire and Cheshire, and a few other counties, which were affiliated to their provincial joint councils and applied the rates negotiated by these councils. One of the main groups of manual workers employed by the counties were the county-council roadmen, whose pay was widely settled at, or a little above, the statutory rate settled by the county agricultural committees for agricultural labourers. The two major unions organizing manual workers in local government in 1934, the General and Municipal Workers and the Transport and General Workers, with their membership concentrated in urban authorities, took no special action to assist the county roadmen to obtain higher pay, but there was a third union in the field, the National Union of Public Employees, which originated with a minority of members of the Municipal Employees' Association who had refused to accept the amalgamation that formed the General and Municipal Workers in 1924, and maintained a separate existence.

In 1933 the Public Employees had appointed a new general secretary, Bryn Roberts, hitherto a miners' agent in South Wales whose career had closely paralleled that of an even more famous Welsh trade-unionist, Arthur Horner.<sup>128</sup> Both of them had worked in the pits and had been strongly influenced by the ideas associated with the Labour College.

<sup>127</sup> Clegg, *General Union*, 190.

<sup>128</sup> See p. 434.

Roberts had attended a course there, and Horner was intending to do so when he decided to get married instead. They were both conscientious objectors during the war, and were on the run to avoid imprisonment. Both men were elected checkweighmen after the war, and subsequently to full-time union posts as miners' agents. Roberts worked for the Rhymney Valley district, but when his son contracted tuberculosis he decided to look for a job in a milder climate than that of the Welsh valleys. He applied for the post of general secretary of the Public Employees which was advertised when the incumbent, Jack Wills, died in 1933. Roberts was interviewed and appointed in December of that year. Dynamic and ambitious, he decided on a programme for membership growth, although the union was in debt to the bank and would have to borrow more to finance the programme which would entail a considerable expansion of the union's organizing staff. He had chosen just the right moment—when union membership generally was beginning to recover from the Depression, and there was once more a prospect of promoting successful wage-claims. From 12,000 members in 1934 the union grew to 50,000 by 1939.

Special attention was paid to county-council roadmen. A separate recruitment campaign was launched for them, with considerable success, leading to the establishment of the Joint Industrial Council for County Council Roadmen. Roberts then launched a campaign aimed to secure legal enforcement of the agreements reached by the council. In the provincial councils of the National Non-Trading Council for Local Authority Services he laid claim to representation where his union had none, and to increased representation on the others. In most instances he was successful, but in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, where separate wages boards had been set up before the provincial councils were instituted elsewhere, and continued to function, the General and Municipal Workers remained in exclusive control. Roberts was not noted for his modesty. Worried by the success of his recruitment campaigns, the leaders of the General and Municipal Workers sought to put an end to competition between the two unions by proposing an amalgamation between them. They offered Roberts the post of national secretary for the combined membership among local-government employees following the merger. He replied that he would accept this offer only if he was guaranteed the succession to the general secretaryship of the whole union when Dukes retired. The talks were terminated.

After the First World War a National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical Services had been set up, along with provincial councils, to deal with the salaries and conditions of service of white-collar staff. However, the

national council ambitiously attempted to draw up national salary scales. Such an invasion of the 'sovereignty' of individual local authorities was unacceptable, and the national associations of local authorities—the Urban District Association, the Rural District Association, the County Councils' Association, and the Association of Municipal Corporations—all withdrew from the national council, leaving it defunct. However, three provincial councils survived—Lancashire and Cheshire, the West Riding, and the City of London—and continued to negotiate with the National Association of Local Government Officers; and a number of individual authorities in other parts of the country continued to negotiate individual agreements with the union. In the 1930s the union decided to draw up a salary scale of its own to guide its negotiators, and, in order to gather information about the prevailing situation, sent a questionnaire to its branches.

The replies covered 890 local authorities—just about half the total. Of these 890—mainly the bigger and therefore, presumably, the better-paying—nearly half had no salary structure of any kind and two-thirds had no establishment committee nor any machinery through which staff might voice grievances. . . .

More serious, many of the branches in which conditions were worst resented the implication that the N[ational] E[xecutive] C[ouncil] might be thinking of going over their heads to seek better conditions for their members. There were many reasons for this. Some branch executives were dominated by chief officers determined to be masters in their own house. Some feared the antagonism of local tradesmen and ratepayers' organisations should they dare to ask for more. Some were nervous of victimisation at the hand of 'council dictators'.<sup>129</sup>

The executive decided to proceed to extend the coverage of agreements by recreating provincial councils, and meanwhile to set a target salary of £225 at age 27. 'When every officer has been brought to this datum line, we shall raise it.'<sup>130</sup> Soon afterwards, Edward Bishop and Haden Corser, respectively employers' side and workers' side secretaries of the Lancashire and Cheshire Provincial Council, induced the Standing Joint Council of Provincial Councils, which had been formed in 1925, to adopt the title of 'National Whitley Council'. Whether encouraged by this bold gesture or not, provincial councils were reinstated rapidly in 1938-9, and by the outbreak of war, the number had risen to thirteen.

Superannuation was another issue in which the union took a keen interest. The Local Government Superannuation Act of 1922 permitted local authorities to adopt contributory superannuation schemes for their officers, but the union wanted their adoption to be made obligatory. The

<sup>129</sup> Alec Spoor, *White-Collar Union* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 125.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 126-7.



local-authority associations came round to their view, and in 1934 they joined with the union and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress in a joint committee to lobby Parliament and the government for a bill. They were successful. The 1937 Acts (one for England and Wales and another for Scotland) obliged local authorities to provide pension schemes for full-time officers. The 1922 Act had allowed local authorities to provide pensions for their manual employees also, and the General and Municipal Workers especially had agitated for authorities to make use of this facility. Along with the Transport and General Workers and the Public Employees, they had given enthusiastic support to the 1937 bills, although these did not extend compulsion to manual workers. The Acts, however, gave the unions a new argument to use in seeking the provision of pensions for their members; and more and more authorities agreed to do so. The secretary of the Local Government Officers, Levi Hill, was, like Bryn Roberts, an enthusiast for publicity. During the Depression he had organized a campaign against the government's economy cuts, and in 1934 he switched the union's energies to the celebration of the centenary of the Municipal Corporations Act due in the following year. 'Every newspaper was bombarded with letters and articles. The Government Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, the churches and civic organisations of all kinds were persuaded to support.'<sup>131</sup> The success of this campaign led to fetching Alec Spoor from Fleet Street in 1937 to fill the combined post of public relations officer and editor of the union journal, *Local Government Service*.

Domestic and secretarial staff in local-authority schools were paid on scales negotiated by the relevant local authority national and provincial joint industrial councils, but teachers had their own negotiating arrangements in the Burnham Committee, distinguished from other joint industrial councils by having an independent chairman—originally Lord Burnham. In fact there were two committees, the main committee, for schoolteachers, and the technical committee for teachers in technical institutions; but 'the Burnham Committee', without qualification, is usually used to refer to the main committee. In its early years this committee had effected a remarkable improvement in the economic position of schoolteachers. By 1925 the average real salary of male teachers was 80 per cent above what it had been in 1920. The cut of 10 per cent in teachers' salaries in 1931 was imposed directly by the government. The committee refused to have anything to do with it. It continued to renew its 1925 agreement year by year until the cuts were restored, in two stages in July 1934 and July 1935. Thereafter the only

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 136.

change in salaries negotiated by the committee before the war was the abolition of the lowest scale. The absence of a general salary increase in the second half of the thirties when the pay of most other employees was rising entailed a slight erosion of the relative advantage gained in the twenties, and a modest reduction in the value of teachers' salaries, due to rising prices; but the teachers were left with the greater part of what they had gained. The historian of the National Union of Teachers concluded:

During the period between the wars, it was possible to trace a rise in the social status of the teaching profession. Such indices as the growing number of teachers and ex-teachers who were chosen as candidates for municipal or parliamentary office, the increasing number of teacher magistrates and more favourable references to teachers in the popular press can be taken as evidence of the rising status of the profession. . . . During the thirties the profession was more remunerative than ever before and most older teachers look back to this time with nostalgia. Secondly, one must put the freedom of teachers from mass unemployment and the continuing effects of the success of the NUT in freeing teachers from the humiliating insecurities connected with low salaries, no retiring pension, insecurity of tenure, compulsory extraneous duties, a barring from the higher posts in the profession and constant supervision.<sup>132</sup>

In 1919 a referendum of its members had committed the union to the principle of equal pay. The Burnham Committees, however, settled for a figure of four-fifths of the male teacher's salary for a woman in an equivalent post, and this relationship remained unaltered up to the outbreak of war and beyond. The referendum nevertheless led to the formation of the National Association of Schoolmasters in protest against the policy of equal pay. In reaction to this breakaway some women teachers set up the National Union of Women Teachers. Given that the major union was committed to equal pay, there was not much to justify this second secession, and it remained a feeble organization; the Schoolmasters, on the other hand, showed some vigour. There were also associations for men and women teachers in grammar schools, associations for teachers and for principals in technical institutions, and one for teachers in colleges and departments of education. But the National Union of Teachers, with over 155,000 members in 1938, outnumbered the rest of these organizations put together by three to one. Despite 'the freedom of teachers from mass unemployment', a margin of unemployed teachers persisted throughout the decade. Between 1929 and 1931 teachers' training-colleges had expanded their entries in expectation of the raising of the school-leaving age, but in February 1931 the bill to accomplish this change was defeated in the

<sup>132</sup> Asher Tropp, *The School Teachers* (London: Heinemann, 1957), 227-8.

House of Lords, and no subsequent attempt was made before the war to revive it. Initially the government encouraged the local education authorities to use the opportunity to improve their staffing ratios, but the worsening economic crisis ruled out anything more generous than a maintenance of existing numbers, and attempts to reduce entries to the colleges achieved very little. But even then schoolteachers retained more favourable employment opportunities than many other professions.

The main negotiating body for the staffs of mental hospitals was the joint conciliation committee of the Mental Hospitals' Association and the Mental Hospital and Institutional Workers' Union, but its coverage was far from complete. The London County Council, Middlesex, Surrey, and a number of other county councils were not members of the Mental Hospitals' Association. 'In 1933 wage cuts were in most instances restored . . . and in subsequent years small improvements were made',<sup>133</sup> and in 1937 the working week was reduced to fifty-four hours exclusive of mealtimes. Equally important to the staff were concessions to relieve the spartan discipline that had ruled in mental hospitals, such as a recommendation that staff bedrooms should have separate keys, and that in hospitals where members of staff were obliged to ask permission to marry, it should be sought from the visiting committee rather than the medical superintendent.

There was no national negotiating body to cover general hospitals, and no separate trade union to represent their staffs. The National Poor Law Officers' Association had merged with the Local Government Officers in 1930. In 1938 the recently formed National Association of Nurses merged with the Public Employees. The National Union of County Officers, a small organization which had maintained an existence separate from the Local Government Officers, also recruited nurses; and in 1933 the London County Council Staff Association, which had also stayed out of the major union, opened a nurses' section. The general unions also claimed membership among hospital staffs. The Royal College of Nursing, priding itself on its status as a professional association, stayed aloof from trade union activity.

In 1934 the newly formed London County Council, finding itself squeezed between a shortage of nurses and a rising demand for hospital beds, extended the working week of nurses in hospitals from forty-eight hours to fifty and more, and reduced leave-entitlement. Consequently at the Trades Union Congress in 1935 the National Union of County Officers, which was particularly active among nurses in London, carried a resolution instructing 'the General Council to use its influence to

<sup>133</sup> M. J. Carpenter, 'The Development of Trade Union Activity among Nurses in Britain, 1910-76' (University of Warwick Ph.D. thesis, 1985), 190.

obtain for all employees in hospitals and institutions throughout England and Wales, a maximum working week of 48 hours, with the provision of one clear day's rest in seven and without loss of pay'. As a result, in the following May the General Council called a conference of the two general unions, the County Officers, the Public Employees, and the Mental Hospital and Institutional Workers which resolved to ask the Minister of Health to receive a deputation. In fact the deputation met the Permanent Secretary who told them that 'the Minister was in entire sympathy with the object of trying to prevent excessive hours of work by nurses and so securing the efficiency of hospital services. He promised that sympathetic consideration would be given to the suggestions of the deputation, and that if it were possible to render assistance in this matter it would be done.'<sup>134</sup> Undeterred by this bromide, the General Council went ahead to set up a Joint Advisory Council for the Nursing Profession, with representatives of the General Council and the above-mentioned unions together with the Women Public Health Officers' Association. This council drew up a detailed 'Charter for the Nursing Profession', including a list of demands for improvements in conditions of service and in training, and the establishment of a national council 'to determine minimum rates of salary and maximum hours of duty etc., and with power to form such regional machinery as desired', along with local joint consultative committees empowered to deal with questions of discipline and staffing.<sup>135</sup>

In 1938 the General Council was able to report some results. The government had appointed an Inter-departmental Committee on Nursing Conditions and Recruitment, chaired by the Earl of Athlone, to which its Nursing Advisory Committee had submitted a memorandum based on the charter, and sent a deputation to give evidence. There had also been 'very substantial increases in the Nursing membership of the Unions concerned . . . during the past year'.<sup>136</sup> The Athlone Committee issued its interim and only report early in 1939. It found that

there exists an acute shortage of nurses, both of candidates for training and of State Registered Nurses. . . . having regard to the responsibilities of their work, nurses as a class are badly underpaid. . . . Only if the two fundamental matters of salary and pension are treated on a national basis will the present position of the profession be improved. . . . whatever scales of salaries may be ultimately established they should show a marked improvement over the scales at present in force.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1936), 151.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* (1937), 96-7.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* (1938), 108.

<sup>137</sup> Inter-departmental Committee on Nursing Services, *Interim Report* (London, HMSO, 1989), paras. 13, 15, 19.



It also criticized the 'long hours of work' and reported that 'no aspect of the nurse's life has incurred more criticism than the discipline and restrictions on personal liberty to which she is submitted'.<sup>138</sup> To remedy these defects, it proposed salary committees analogous to the Burnham Committees; a 'Nurses Council in each hospital' on the same lines as a Whitley committee; and, to cover the costs of these 'essential reforms . . . a system of grants from public funds to the voluntary hospitals' should be established.<sup>139</sup> Little more was done before the outbreak of war, but in 1941 and 1942 committees were appointed to make recommendations on the salaries and emoluments of nurses and midwives.

*Gas, Electricity, and Water Supply*

There is no obvious slot in this survey of collective bargaining for negotiations concerning the employees of these three industries. The undertakings that employed them were fairly evenly divided between local authorities and private companies, and the majority of their employees who belonged to unions were members of the unions that also catered for manual and white-collar local-authority staffs. Many of their white-collar staff belonged to the National and Local Government Officers' Association, although there was also a powerful Electrical Power Engineers' Association. The main unions organizing manual workers were the two general unions (some of them in a separate section of the Transport and General Workers known as the National Union of Enginemen, Firemen, Mechanics, Motormen and Electrical Workers); although there was also a National Union of Waterworks Employees and most of the maintenance staff of all three services belonged to one or other of the engineering unions. Both on the union side and on the employers' side, therefore, these industries had more in common with the two sides of the local-government service than with any other collective-bargaining institutions, and it seems more appropriate to deal with them after the other local-government services, and before the Civil Service, than anywhere else.

Gas and electricity had well-established joint industrial councils. In addition the electricity industry had a joint board for technical staff in which the technicians were represented by the Electrical Power Engineers' Association. The employers' side of the national joint council for electricity supply included several associations of power companies along with local-authority representatives from the employers' sides of the district joint councils; and the workers' side was drawn from the Engineers, the Electricians, and the two general unions. All the gas

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 117, 137.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 169.

undertakings were affiliated to the Federation of Gas Employers, and only the two general unions had seats on the workers' side. Two problems that recurred in negotiations in electricity, and especially in gas, were: first, the relative powers of the national councils and the district councils, as they were called in electricity, or the regional councils, as they were called in gas; and, secondly, the effect of national agreements for improvements in pay and conditions in regions (or districts), or in individual undertakings, which were already providing pay and conditions at a higher standard than that provided by the existing national agreements. Trade union concern over these issues was mainly due to the constitution of the General and Municipal Workers which emphasized the autonomy of the union's district committees. These committees covered much larger areas than the district committees of the Engineers, and were, in most instances, equivalent to regions.

Wage cuts in the Depression had not been uniform. Nine electricity districts had imposed cuts, and in gas the national council had agreed to cuts of varying severity in six regions. Early in 1934 the electricity cuts were restored, but negotiations were more difficult in the gas industry. Gas suffered from the competition of its younger and more rapidly growing rival, which enjoyed a lower proportion of labour costs to total costs. Restoration was agreed in only four gas regions, and not to the full amount of the cut—except in one undertaking, in Neath. There the men decided that the local authority could afford to return to the full 20p and struck. The General and Municipal Workers persuaded them to return to work with a promise of further negotiations, and a settlement was reached, not for an increase in pay of 20p a week, but for a 'prosperity bonus' of 80p a month! Meanwhile the workers' side of the national electricity council had decided to submit a claim for an increase of 40p a week 'subject to the right of district councils to pursue their own claims'.<sup>140</sup> When their employers rejected the claim it was submitted to the Industrial Court which awarded an advance of 10p a week in July 1935. The workers' side of the national gas council now decided to ask for 20p a week. Their employers replied with a detailed statement of their economic position intended to demonstrate that they were unable to offer any increase at all.

In the previous year a new general secretary, Charles Dukes, had been elected to take office in the General and Municipal Workers' Union. He decided that the employers were making light of the claim because they did not think that the union had the strength to force them to concede. He decided to defer the claim and institute a recruiting

<sup>140</sup> General and Municipal Workers' Union, *Executive Minutes* (25 Oct. 1934).

campaign. He persuaded his executive to accept this course of action at their meeting on 12 December 1935, and over the following months, whenever the district representatives on the executive pressed for the submission of a pay-claim, he urged the need for greater zeal in recruitment. He pointed out that union membership was relatively strong in the municipal undertakings and north of a line from the Severn to the Wash, but weak in the company undertakings and south of that line. By May 1936 he was willing to allow a claim to be submitted, and on 2 July a general increase of 10p a week was reported to the executive. While agreeing to the increase, the employers had 'expressed disappointment that their case had not been answered'.<sup>141</sup> At the end of the year the workers' side decided to ask for a further 10p a week. The employers prevaricated, once more claiming inability to pay, but in November 1937 they agreed to the claim. Meanwhile the workers' side of the electricity council had claimed an increase of 60p a week, which led to agreement on 15p.

In the negotiations over the increase for gasworkers, the employers had insisted that something must be done about the 'better conditions' clause which had traditionally been inserted in their agreements. This clause provided that workers receiving higher pay or better conditions than those prescribed in the previous agreement should retain that relative advantage over the terms of the new agreement. Dukes insisted that the workers' side must be ready to discuss the matter, and it was settled that each region should set up a subcommittee to discuss the clause and refer any disagreements to the national council. However, there is no record of any regional workers' side making any concessions on the issue. In 1938 claims were presented to two regional councils for improvements in their overtime and holiday conditions. Nationally the employers 'made the strongest possible objection to this, insisting that "where a matter has been settled nationally, it could only be varied by the national body"'.<sup>142</sup> At the meeting of the General and Municipal Workers' executive on 20 July 1939 there was talk about a 'uniform policy' for the gas industry which Dukes said was impracticable. The national officer responsible for the gas industry, Tom Williamson, said that he was preparing a report on wages, and meanwhile districts were entitled to submit claims for an increase in annual holidays from seven to fourteen days, but they should remember that some employers were paying 40p or 50p above the scheduled rates, 'and we might get "better conditions" thrown at us'.

Negotiations in water supply and the pattern of wage movements there followed much the same course as in the two larger services.

<sup>141</sup> Clegg, *General Union*, 156.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 156.

*The Civil Service*

The structure of collective bargaining in the Civil Service had been decided in 1919 when a national joint council was established to deal with the pay and conditions of service of classes of civil servants employed in more than one department, along with some eighty departmental joint councils to deal with issues affecting only departmental classes. Because the ideas that inspired these arrangements were derived from the reports of the Whitley Committee set up in 1916, they were called the National Whitley Council and departmental Whitley councils. The co-ordination of their work was the job of the Treasury, without whose approval no commitment involving expenditure could be made.

The principles on which the pay of civil servants should be settled were set out in the final report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, chaired by Lord Tomlin, which was published in 1931. The commission rejected the view, advanced by the national staff side, that the state should be a model employer. It considered that if there was 'fair relativity . . . between the rates of pay of the class of civil servants under review and comparable outside rates, it may be assumed that a satisfactory staff will be recruited and retained'. It was also

satisfied . . . that broad general comparisons between classes in the Service and outside occupations are possible and should be made.

In effecting such comparisons the State should take a long view. Civil Service Remuneration should reflect what may be described as the long term trend, both in wage levels and the economic conditions of the country.<sup>143</sup>

The main general classes of civil servants with which the National Whitley Council was concerned were the administrative class, represented by the First Division Association; the executive class, represented by the Society of Civil Servants; and the clerical class, represented by the Civil Service Clerical Association, although there was also a class of female writing assistants represented by the same union. In addition, there were the professional, scientific, and technical classes, represented by the Institution of Professional Civil Servants.

By far the largest employer among the departments was the Post Office, which dealt with two major unions: the Union of Post Office Workers, which catered for postmen, sorters, counter staff, and telephonists, and the Post Office Engineering Union. The Post Office Workers, however, were plagued by secessions. They faced competition from the Guild of Postal Sorters, the Association of Counter Clerks, the

<sup>143</sup> Royal Commission on the Civil Service, *Report*, Cmd. 3909 (1931), paras. 307-8.



Government Overseas Cable and Wireless Operators' Association, and the National Association of Postmen. Another major departmental employer was the Inland Revenue which negotiated with the Inland Revenue Staff Association. Negotiations for government industrial employees in the Royal Ordnance Factories and the Royal Dockyards were the business of an Engineering Trade Joint Council and a Shipbuilding Trade Joint Council in which representatives of the Treasury and the Ministry of Labour, along with representatives of the employing departments, met the engineering unions and the shipbuilding unions. There was also a Miscellaneous Trades Joint Council to cover other departments employing industrial workers.

There was little difficulty in securing the information needed to apply the principle of 'fair relativities' to these industrial employees. The agreements covering the pay and conditions of the same grades of worker in private employment were readily available; but the same could not be said for the general classes in the non-industrial Civil Service. As B. V. Humphreys wrote in relation to the clerical class:

Probably the most telling argument . . . was that the general lack of information about clerical salaries and the wide variance in rates among the few firms which could be persuaded to submit information to the Staff or Official Sides hardly constituted a fair picture of what the actual situation was on the outside. . . . In fact, it was believed by many associations that a good percentage of outside firms adjusted their salaries in response to Civil Service pay.<sup>144</sup>

If this was the situation in which comparisons of clerical salaries had to be made, how much more difficult must it have been to make satisfactory comparisons for the higher grades of the Civil Service, where accurate information from outside the service would have been even harder to come by. It is not surprising that there were no significant adjustments in the pay of the non-industrial Civil Service during the thirties following from the application of the Tomlin formula of 'fair relativity'. Such increases as were granted were justified in other ways.

One of the recommendations of the Tomlin report had been that the cost-of-living bonus paid to civil servants should be terminated, and that the existing bonus should be consolidated into their salaries. Before this was done, pay cuts were imposed in 1931 and 1932 as part of the government's economy drive. The intention was that the terms of consolidation should be settled by April 1934, when part of the economy cuts was to be restored. No agreement had been reached by that date and in July the government imposed its own terms, which nevertheless gave many civil servants a small increase in their pay in April 1935, when

<sup>144</sup> B. V. Humphreys, *Clerical Unions in the Civil Service* (Oxford: Blackwell and Mott, 1958), 197-8.

the final restoration of the cuts was also made. The Tomlin Commission had recommended that some routine duties be transferred from clerical officers to writing assistants, so as to reduce the monotony of their work, and to increase their chances of promotion. It would also justify 'a somewhat higher rate of pay' for them.<sup>145</sup> This gave W. J. Brown, the general secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association, an excellent opportunity to put in a pay-claim on behalf of both clerical officers and writing assistants since the work of both classes would become more responsible as a result of the change. The claim was presented in 1936. The transfer of duties was agreed, writing assistants were renamed clerical assistants, and the maximum salaries of both grades were increased, although the clerical officer scale was also reduced slightly in the lower ranges.

From a long range point of view the arrangement had distinct advantages. By bringing the wages of Clerical Assistants up substantially and those of lower Clerical Officers down slightly, the differential between the two grades was narrowed to the point where the advantages of substitution of cheaper workers would be negligible. Secondly, by acknowledging the overlapping of the two grades and negotiating on this basis, the CSCA had tied the scales together and simplified future wage negotiations.<sup>146</sup>

Brown's next claim had a less firm foundation in the Tomlin report, which had rejected his proposal that the departmental clerical classes should be unified; but it had added that 'unnecessary differences in regard to grading and organisation should be avoided'.<sup>147</sup> When later in 1936 he approached the Treasury on their behalf, he was told he must submit a separate claim to each department. He then proposed to send a common claim to arbitration, but was told that he must submit separate claims which would be adjudicated individually by the tribunal. However, after he had promoted a publicity campaign and threatened a stay-in strike, the Treasury relented, agreeing that the cases could be heard consecutively and a single award issued after the last claim had been heard. There had been a change in the arrangements for arbitration in the Civil Service earlier that year. The original Civil Service Arbitration Board had been abolished on grounds of economy in 1922, and thereafter Civil Service cases had been sent to the Industrial Court. The staff side of the National Whitley Council objected to this arrangement on the grounds that the members of the court were not necessarily knowledgeable about the Civil Service. The Tomlin Commission could see no virtue in this objection,<sup>148</sup> but the government proved more sympathetic, and the Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal

<sup>145</sup> Cmd. 3909 (1931), para. 55.

<sup>147</sup> Cmd. 3909 (1931), para. 152.

<sup>146</sup> Humphreys, 183-4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 513.

was set up with an independent chairman, and 'side' members chosen from panels selected respectively by the Treasury and the national staff side. It was this tribunal that heard Brown present his case, and awarded substantial increases at the top of the salary scales of most of the departmental clerical grades, bringing them close to the maximum salary of the general grade of clerical officers.

The Civil Service unions were committed to the principle of equal pay and on this issue, perhaps surprisingly, they had the support of the Tomlin report which recommended that the principle should be adopted and applied over a period of ten years. The Treasury, however, would make no move in this direction until 1936, when Ellen Wilkinson carried an amendment in the House of Commons supporting equal pay by 156 votes to 148. This was followed by an agreement that men and women in the same class should receive the same salary on recruitment, and that the maximum for women should not be less than 80 per cent of the maximum for men. However, the agreement was not strictly applied in all departments. In the Post Office the figure was 'in most cases . . . nearer 75 per cent'.<sup>149</sup>

Comparisons with outside employment could be made more easily for most Post Office staff than for the non-industrial Civil Service; and, as wages rose generally during the latter half of the decade, it was to be expected that the Post Office unions would submit pay-claims. However, when the Post Office Workers submitted their case for an increase of 15 per cent in 1937, they justified it mainly on the grounds that the value of their work had increased greatly over the previous decade. The Post Office thought the size of the claim did 'not furnish a useful basis for negotiation', and the case went to the Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal. There were forty-three days of hearings lasting from May to November 1938.

The main burden of the argument presented by the Union was that their work was more valuable in 1938 than it had been in 1928 in terms of output, productivity and technical difficulty. However, they began by presenting a very wide range of argument about the poverty of their membership, the generally rising level of wages and prices, and the rises in the National Income and the Wealth of the Post Office. . . . The rising number of letters and telegrams delivered, telephone calls connected, postal orders and licences issued, combined with the increased income and profits made the case that Post Office workers . . . merited greater rewards.<sup>150</sup>

The management argued that technological changes had made the work of the staff easier, but based its reply mainly on comparisons with pay in

<sup>149</sup> Alan Clinton, *Post Office Workers* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 431.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 485-91.

other industries; and T. J. Hodgson, the general secretary of the union, who had paid little attention to comparisons in presenting his case, made a detailed reply. The outcome was that staff at most points on the scale got increases of 6.8 per cent, an award that brought 'great rejoicing at UPW house'.<sup>151</sup>

This arbitration case held up the claim that had already been prepared by the Post Office Engineering Union, which chose to base its case on comparisons with outside pay. Such comparisons were relatively straightforward since its members' work could be compared with that of engineering workers in outside industry without too much difficulty. Agreement was reached, without arbitration, in 1939. The increases were to be paid in two instalments, in October 1939 and October 1940. Skilled workers grade 1 outside London were to receive an overall increase of 6.7 per cent at the bottom of the scale and 10.1 per cent at the top; skilled workers grade 2 and unskilled workers outside London were to receive 7.1 per cent at the bottom and 14.3 per cent at the top; and labourers in their first year were to receive no increase at all, but outside London those with three years' service received an increase of 8 per cent.<sup>152</sup> Because of the staging of these increases over two years, it is impossible to make an accurate comparison between them and the increases awarded to the Post Office Workers; but it does seem that, except for the labourers, the Engineers had an advantage. Another means of increasing pay for the Post Office Engineers, as for other civil servants, was regrading. This would normally affect individuals only, but in 1938 it was agreed that all 'general fitters' should be in grade 1, whereas previously only half of them had been in this grade.<sup>153</sup>

### *The Development of Collective Bargaining*

The coverage of collective bargaining was greatly extended in Britain during the six years before the Second World War. In 1934 collective agreements in the retail trades barely extended beyond the boundaries of the co-operative societies. By 1939 the Shop Assistants had also negotiated agreements with three of the largest associations of multiple shops. In 1934 there was little or no collective-bargaining machinery for busmen employed by private operators. By 1939 many of these operators held agreements with the Transport and General Workers or the Railwaymen, and talks were being held at the invitation of the Ministry of Labour which led to the formation of the National Council for the Omnibus Industry in the following year. At the beginning of 1934 there

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 491.

<sup>152</sup> Frank Bealey, *The Post Office Engineering Union* (London: Bachman & Turner, 1976), 216.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 218.



were few agreements in road haulage. Later that year a National Joint Conciliation Board for the Road Motor Transport Industry (Goods) had been established, and by 1939 its effectiveness had been greatly strengthened by the establishment of the statutory Road Haulage Wages Board for A and B licencees. Similarly, two joint industrial councils had been set up in the rubber industry with the backing of trade boards, and the furniture industry's agreements were supported by another trade board.

In 1934 the collective-bargaining machinery of the wool and worsted industry had fallen into disuse, but by 1939 it had been restored to full operation. In 1934 only three of the provincial joint councils set up after the First World War to negotiate for white-collar local-government employees remained in existence, and the national council was defunct. By 1939 there were thirteen provincial councils, affiliated to a new national council. The efforts of the local-government unions and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress had brought collective bargaining much nearer realization in the general hospital service through the recommendations of the Athlone Committee. In private industry some progress had been made in establishing collective bargaining for clerical staff in coalmining and steel, and in extending it in the printing industry. The coverage of collective bargaining in hosiery and footwear had been extended beyond the main centres of these industries to outlying areas.

Of equal, or even greater, importance than the introduction of collective bargaining into industries where it had not existed before, or its reintroduction where it had withered away, and the strengthening of collective bargaining where its grip had weakened, was the growth in its coverage of industries where its stability was not in doubt, by means of the growth in the size of federated firms and the adherence of previously unfederated firms to the employers' organizations. In engineering this extension can be measured with precision. The numbers employed in federated firms increased from 412,000 in 1933 to 861,000 in 1939, more than doubling over the period.<sup>154</sup> This expansion was certainly more rapid than in most other industries because of the effect of rearmament on engineering employment. The figures for total trade union membership in Great Britain are probably the best available guide to the overall growth of collective bargaining. Union membership increased by over 43 per cent from 3,637,000 in 1933 to 5,224,000 in 1939. This growth in the coverage of collective bargaining was most welcome to the trade unions, but it was not wholly or indeed mainly due

<sup>154</sup> On p. 3 figures were given for the growth of employment in federated firms from 1934 to 1939. The increase from 1933 to 1934 was 86,000, so that growth from 1934 to 1939 was 70 per cent.

to their efforts. The main influence at work was the economic recovery from the Depression, supported by rearmament. Apart from that, employers and their organizations must be allowed a substantial share of the credit, and so must the Ministry of Labour and Parliament. Most extensions of collective bargaining came where unions were relatively weak. They lacked the strength to force the employers to the bargaining-table; and in most instances the employers did not have to be forced. They wanted to come, if they could have the assurance that their competitors would not be able to undercut them by evading the agreement. This was true of retail distribution, of road haulage, of the rubber industry, and of furniture. Admittedly the Wool Employers' Council needed the threat of a strike in 1936 to make it seek the intervention of the Ministry of Labour to advise it on reviving its collective-bargaining arrangements, but it showed no reluctance to accept that advice, and it is possible that many wool employers welcomed the threat because of the excuse it gave them to take steps to restore their joint council.

However, the attitude of employers was important not only where it led to the creation or restoration of collective bargaining. The spirit in which they conducted collective bargaining was also a major influence on its success. Few other industries could equal the close co-operation between the Iron and Steel Employers' Association and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation; but the eagerness of the engineering employers to maintain good relations with the engineering unions, and especially the Engineers, and their readiness to modify their demands and responses have already been described above. It contrasted strongly with the confrontations of the 1920s, and unquestionably elicited favourable reactions from the union side. Much the same can be said about the cotton employers and the building and printing employers. Many others also took the trouble to maintain friendly and co-operative relations with their unions. The goodwill of many employers' associations towards the unions and collective bargaining was all the more important because of the domination 'of industrial relations policy' at the Ministry of Labour by Frederick Leggett, 'whose fanatical defence of free collective bargaining led him to resist any move by the state to give an industrial lead unless it had the full backing of both sides of industry',<sup>155</sup> for the 1930s must be one of the most productive periods of state intervention in industrial relations, with the Road Traffic Acts of 1930 and 1933, followed by the Road Haulage Wages Act 1938, the Cotton Manufacturing Industry (Temporary Provisions) Act 1934

<sup>155</sup> Lowe, 69. The quotation continues, '—a condition which in view of the attitudes of inter-war employers—was outwith the realms of practicability'. This statement is surely untrue.

(personally devised by Leggett), the Holidays with Pay Act 1938, the establishment of trade boards for rubber manufacture and reclamation, for furniture, and for baking, and the promise of trade boards for the retail trades.

This was also one of the most conflict-free periods in British industrial-relations history. The number of strikes rose annually from 245 in 1933 to 672 and then fell to 512 in 1938, rising again slightly to 536 in 1939. This is the normal response in the upswing of the trade cycle, with rising employment and prices, such as occurred in 1933-7 and faltered in 1938. However, if the number of working days lost through strikes is taken as the measure of industrial unrest, 1934-9 was one of the most peaceful periods in British industrial relations since accurate records were first collected in 1893; and if the year 1933 is included with them, they become *the* most peaceful period of seven years between 1893 and 1992, with 1934-40 and 1948-54 as their nearest rivals. Since one of the objectives of collective bargaining is to settle industrial disputes, if possible without stoppages of work, this feature of the period could be added to the growth of collective bargaining as evidence that this was one of the most successful periods in the history of British industrial relations; and the credit for both parts of the achievement must be shared between the unions, the employers, and the Ministry of Labour and Parliament. However, to the extent that the outcome can be attributed to conscious endeavour, then it is the unions, and above all the secretary of the Trades Union Congress, Walter Citrine, who can claim responsibility. For it was he who took the lead in reformulating the philosophy of the unions after their defeat in the General Strike.

The previous volume attempted to summarise the new doctrine in these words: 'Trade unions, therefore, were able to protect the liberties and advance the economic interests of their members within existing capitalist society . . . provided that the scope of collective bargaining was extended to its full potential, and adequate means of consultation between industrial organisations and the government were established.'<sup>156</sup> In pursuit of these objectives, Citrine and other trade union leaders, particularly Bevin, sought to increase the influence of their unions, if possible without calling strikes, by extending the coverage of collective-bargaining machinery and the range of issues that it handled; and to extend their influence, not only with employers, but also with the Cabinet, government departments, and Parliament. This chapter has recorded their success in extending their influence over employers. The next chapter deals with their political influence.

<sup>156</sup> *History*, ii, 464.

## Trade Unions in the Labour Movement 1934-1939

### *Congress and the General Council*

The Trades Union Congress met annually in the first full week of September to discuss the report of its General Council, to debate resolutions submitted by its 200-odd affiliated unions or by the Council, and to choose the members of the Council for the following twelve months. For this purpose the unions were divided into seventeen groups, to each of which was allotted one, two, or three seats on the Council, roughly according to the membership covered by the group. Every union within a group was entitled to nominate candidates for the allotted seats. There was also an eighteenth group for women, with two seats on the Council, to which all unions with women members were entitled to nominate candidates—making thirty-two seats in all. Election to the Council, however, was by the vote of Congress as a whole. Each affiliated union was entitled to send one delegate to Congress 'for every 5,000 members or fraction thereof'. Not all of them filled their quotas, but that did not diminish their voting strength, since voting was by cards, issued to each union 'on the basis of one vote for every 1,000 members or fractional part thereof represented'.

These democratic processes, set out in the Standing Orders of Congress, were modified by the practices of the unions. If the number of nominees for one of the eighteen electoral groups was the same as the number of its allotted seats, there was no contest. Since the Agricultural Workers were the sole union in the group for agriculture, there would be a contest there only if the union nominated two or more candidates for the one allotted seat; and it did not do so. There were three unions in the railways group, and their practice was for each union to nominate one candidate; as the group was allotted three seats, there was no contest. The general workers' group consisted of three unions: the General and Municipal Workers with 250,000 members in 1935, and two other unions with fewer than 2,000 members between them. The two latter unions made no nominations and the General and Municipal Workers made three for the group's three seats. Their candidates were therefore declared elected. In 1935 there was no contest in eleven of the



eighteen groups, but it was exceptional. The following year the number of groups without a contest was down to eight.

In 1935 three relatively small unions carried a resolution instructing the Council to inquire into the grouping system; the number of seats allotted to each group; and whether 'the present system of nomination is in need of revision'. The resolution was referred to the Council's Finance and General Purposes Committee which proposed that there should be no change in the method of nomination, but suggested a modest change in the allocation of seats between groups. Membership figures offered support for such a change. Five groups had three seats on the Council. Their membership ranged from over 500,000 for mining and quarrying to just over 250,000 for the general workers' group; and the group for glass, pottery, chemicals, and so on, which included distribution, with just under 250,000 members, had only one seat on the Council. However, when the matter came back to the Council, it agreed that the method of nomination should be left alone, but also rejected the proposed reallocation of seats. As it explained in its report to Congress in 1936, the Council had considered alternative schemes of reallocation, but 'to make alterations in the present system at one point would create further anomalies at another'. With reference to the method of nomination, they admitted that current practices allowed some groups to

determine their own representation and then participate in determining the representation of Groups where there was a contest.

Put in these words it might appear that the solution would be for *each* Group of unions to nominate *and elect* their members on the General Council. To follow this course would undermine the principle now established that Congress elects the General Council.

Even if in a greater number of Groups there was no contest, the ballot on the remainder definitely establishes Congress responsibility, a factor which Congress itself would not desire to disturb.<sup>1</sup>

Congress was not asked to confirm this last statement by a vote; nor did any delegate choose to question the General Council's other assertions.

Standing orders laid down that the president of Congress, who was by custom also the chairman of the Council, should be appointed by the Council 'at its first meeting after the Annual Congress'. He, or she, was 'to preside at all Special Congresses or Conferences for one year following the date of his appointment, and at the Congress concluding his term of office'. In 1937 the Transport and General Workers asked whether it would be possible for Bevin, who had been chosen to take his turn as president for 1936-7, to be re-elected for a second year. Not

<sup>1</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1936), 231-2.

surprisingly, the Finance and General Purposes Committee interpreted the order to mean 'that the Chairman [*sic*] of Congress is eligible to hold office for one year only'. After following the principle of 'Buggins' turn', by confirming the senior member who had not yet presided over Congress in the offices of president of Congress and chairman of the Council, the same meeting went on to deal with the membership of the committees and joint committees through which much of its work was done. In 1934 there were seven standing committees of Council: Finance and General Purposes, Organization, International, Disputes (which dealt with interunion disputes—not strikes), Education, Workmen's Compensation and Factories, and Economic. In addition there were six standing joint advisory committees including representatives from other bodies:<sup>2</sup> the National Joint Advisory Council for Coal Mining, the National Joint Advisory Council for Women's Organizations, the Non-Manual Workers' Advisory Committee, the Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee, the Trade Boards Advisory Committee, and the Social Insurance Advisory Committee. By 1938 four more joint committees had been added: the National Joint Advisory Council for Local Government Service,<sup>3</sup> the National Advisory Council for the Nursing Profession,<sup>4</sup> the Joint Committee of the British Medical Association and the Trades Union Congress on Medical Questions, and the Colonial Advisory Bureau.

Over and above this structure of joint committees stood the National Joint Council of Labour, with the chairmen of the General Council and of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party as joint chairmen, six other members from the Council, two from the National Executive Committee and three from the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The secretaries of all three bodies acted as joint secretaries. There were also *ad hoc* meetings of the chairmen and secretaries of the three bodies; and, more frequently as the decade

<sup>2</sup> Although there were two representatives from the Labour Party on both the Workmen's Compensation and Factories Committee and the Economic Committee, these were not counted as joint committees.

<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this committee was to establish 'some form of contact . . . between all organisations concerned with employees in Local Government Service' (*ibid.* 103), whether affiliated to Congress or not. The main such organization that was not affiliated was the National Association of Local Government Officers about whose bona fides as a trade union some affiliated unions, notably the Public Employees, had doubts. Their general secretary, Bryn Roberts, voiced these doubts forcibly and repeatedly at Congress, in 1935 when the General Council was merely pursuing enquiries (p. 250), in 1936 when it announced its decision to try to establish some form of contact (*ibid.* pp. 254-5), in 1937 when he unsuccessfully moved the 'reference back' of the section of the Council's report announcing the formation of the committee (*ibid.*, 1937, pp. 231-2), and in 1938 when he appealed for its 'early liquidation' (pp. 264-5). He may have feared that, if the status of the Local Government Officers was confirmed by their presence on the committee, they would be able to entice away the relatively few white-collar local-government employees that his union had been able to recruit.

<sup>4</sup> See Ch. 1.

advanced, full joint meetings of the three bodies which came to be called 'the three executives'. Besides all this, there were joint meetings of committees of the General Council and the Labour Party—of the Council's Economic Committee and the party's Policy Committee, for example, and of their International Committees.

Besides the subcommittees of Council and joint committees with other bodies, there were in 1935 nine standing government bodies, including the Railway Rates Tribunal and the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee, on which members of the General Council were serving; and at any one time there were likely to be several members of the Council serving on Royal Commissions or departmental committees of inquiry. The Council, and especially Citrine, was keen to ensure that there should be trade union representatives on all relevant official bodies, that they should be nominated by the Council, and, in most instances, that they should be members of the Council. Thus in March 1934 the Home Office asked the Council to nominate two members to its departmental committee on double-shift working, and they nominated two of its own members. By contrast, in June the Minister of Labour asked for a trade-unionist to serve on the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee, and suggested four names, any one of which, he said, would be 'a valuable member'. The Council's response was to select its own three nominees from its own number by ballot, and to send a deputation to the minister to protest against the procedure he had adopted.<sup>5</sup> One of the Council's nominees was appointed.

Behind all this committee work stood the forty-odd members of the Council's staff, organized in eight departments: Finance, Organization, International, Trade Boards, Education, Research and Economic, Social Insurance, and Publicity—each with its secretary. These departmental secretaries were the senior members of the Council's staff after Citrine and Vincent Tewson, the assistant general secretary. In 1938–9 the income of the Council from affiliation fees was over £44,000.

The duties of the General Council were set out in standing orders. They included helping trade unions in the work of organization, and adjusting disputes between them. 'Where possible', the Council was to 'co-ordinate industrial action' and 'promote common action . . . on general questions, such as wages and hours of labour, and any matter of general concern'. It was empowered, in certain circumstances, to intervene in industrial disputes, to raise levies to test an important legal point in the House of Lords, and 'to assist any union which is attacked on any vital question of Trade Union principle'. It was to try to secure

<sup>5</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (27 June 1934).

united action with trade union movements overseas. In the event of a danger of war, it was to 'call a special Congress to decide on industrial action . . . if possible, before war is declared'. Except for the last item, the Council took action under almost all of these headings in the years before the war. Some were continuing activities. The Organization Committee arranged organization campaigns in different areas each year; and in 1934 it reinstated the award of a badge for the recruitment of ten new members, with a bronze medallion for twenty, and a signed diploma for forty. In 1935 it added a Congress gold badge each for the male trade-unionist and the female trade-unionist recruiting the highest number of new members during the year. In 1935 it reported that between January 1934 and June 1935 the number of new members recruited by the winners of these several awards was 46,500. Every year the Disputes Committee settled several disputes between affiliated unions over membership or recruitment rights, and in 1939 it put before Congress a code of conduct to guide union behaviour in such disputes, which, because of the venue of Congress that year, became known as the 'Bridlington Principles'. United action with trade unions overseas was promoted at the conferences and executive council meetings of the International Federation of Trade Unions, and at meetings of the workers' delegations to the International Labour Organisation.

Action by the Council under other headings had to await an appropriate occasion. In June 1934 the members of the Amalgamated Society of Wire Drawers and Kindred Workers struck over the introduction of the Bedaux system of payment by results at a works in Manchester. In December the General Council sent out an appeal to affiliated unions for funds to support the continuation of the dispute, followed by another in February 1935. It also sent the union a legal opinion on an action brought against it by the firm and the Bedaux company. In the end, however, the firm was able to carry on with non-union labour and the dispute had to be abandoned.<sup>6</sup> In 1935 Congress pledged itself to support the Miners' campaign for a wage increase. The Council kept in close touch with the union's executive during the negotiations, and, along with the Labour Party and other bodies, organized a demonstration in London 'to rouse public opinion on behalf of mineworkers'.<sup>7</sup> In 1936 the Miners approached the General Council 'to enlist the support of the whole Trade Union Movement' to assist them in their dispute at Harworth Colliery in Nottinghamshire over 'the principle of freedom of organisation with trade union recognition for those so organised . . . a principle fundamental to the success of trade unionism'.<sup>8</sup> Again the Council worked closely with the union executive,

<sup>6</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1935), 85-6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* (1936), 83.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* (1937), 87.



and participated in the conduct of a strike ballot. In the end the dispute was settled by the amalgamation of the breakaway 'Spencer' union with the Miners' Federation.<sup>9</sup> However, that was not the end of the Council's part in the matter. Twelve miners were imprisoned as a result of disturbances at Harworth in April 1937, and leave to appeal was refused them. The Council asked the Home Secretary to receive a deputation about revising the sentences. He did not think it proper to receive a deputation on such a subject, but said 'that consideration had been given to the points put forward in correspondence from the General Council, and they were one of the factors which had influenced his decision to recommend the exercise of a measure of clemency in eight of the cases'.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently parts of the sentences of the remaining four were remitted.

However, the staple business of the General Council arose under another clause in the standing orders of Congress which had also applied to the Council's predecessor, the Parliamentary Committee. This was to 'watch all legislation affecting labour, and . . . initiate such legislation as Congress shall direct'. By this time, however, the initiation of legislation was not a major part of the Council's work. That had become more a matter of finding a topic for Labour Members of Parliament who had secured a place in the timetable of the House of Commons, as on 17 March 1936, when the Rev. Reginald Sorensen and Ellis Smith introduced a motion in favour of a forty-hour working week which was defeated by 160 votes to 119. The main concerns of the Council now in relation to legislation were to persuade government departments to introduce bills wanted by the unions; to modify government legislative proposals to suit the unions; and to influence the administration of legislation that had already been passed in order to make its effect more palatable to trade-unionists. The Factories Bill of 1937 serves as an example of the first two of these concerns. In 1936

the General Council had sent a deputation to the Home Secretary to discuss with him the urgency of new factory legislation. The Home Secretary had agreed that the Bill was badly wanted and promised to do everything he could to have it passed into law. . . .

The Bill was issued in February 1937, and whilst it did not come up to the expectations of the Movement, it was certainly a big advance in many directions on the present position. The General Council worked in close touch with the Parliamentary Labour Party and meetings were held every week, when all the necessary amendments and new clauses to bring the bill into line with the policy of the Movement were decided upon. The General Council called into consultation the unions concerned with particular points, and in this way the views of the Movement were continuously made available to the Parliamentary

<sup>9</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1938), 91; see also Vol II, p. 417.

Labour Party and the Home Office. A very good fight was put up by the Parliamentary Labour Party, and as a result, some concessions were ceded by the Government.<sup>11</sup>

An example of the Council's ability to influence the administration of legislation can be taken from the experience of the Unemployment Act of 1934 which the government had designed to 'take unemployment out of politics', by transferring the administration of unemployment benefit from the Ministry of Labour to an Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee, and also that of assistance for the unemployed who had exhausted their entitlement to benefit away from the public assistance committees of the local authorities, to which it had been entrusted in 1929, to a national Unemployment Assistance Board. The unions were not in favour of the bill, against which Congress had 'protested strongly. When passed, they called it a "Slave and Blackleg Act"', and asked for its amendment, when Labour returned to office, 'in accordance with the humane principles which have been repeatedly adopted by all sections of the organised workers.'<sup>12</sup> The Act did not come into force until 7 January 1935. Before that date, the grants made to the unemployed by the public assistance committees had varied considerably from authority to authority, and the new standard rates then introduced involved cuts in the payments to many recipients. The General Council organized its opposition through the National Council of Labour which submitted a protest to the government and arranged conferences throughout the country at which the anger of the whole Labour Movement was expressed; and not only the Labour Movement. 'Protests came from all quarters: from town councils and trade unions, from members of parliament from all parties in the distressed areas.'<sup>13</sup>

As a consequence of the overwhelming defeat of the Labour Party at the general election of 1931, an unprecedentedly large number of constituencies in the distressed areas were represented by Conservatives. The government bowed to the pressure, and 'ran away from their high principles, interfered with the Board that was supposed to be above politics; and forbade any reduction from the previous rates' of the public assistance committees.<sup>14</sup> This was done by a 'standstill arrangement', subsequently given retrospective authorization by an Act, under which 'every person who had had a reduction would have the difference restored, provided his circumstances were the same, whilst those who had received increases would be entitled to retain them'.<sup>15</sup> The board

<sup>11</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1937), 137.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* (1934), 246.

<sup>13</sup> C. L. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars 1918-1940* (London: Methuen, 1955), 472.

<sup>14</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 354.

<sup>15</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1935), 79.

took its time to prepare new standard rates which came into force on 1 April 1937, when it was found that they had been 'generally scaled up so as not to lead to any actual reductions'.<sup>16</sup> However, this signal victory was not the only effect that the Council had on the administration of the Act, which also

involved TUC staff members in complicated and protracted negotiations about the terms of a multitude of regulations spawned by this measure. Moreover, at this level of operation, the TUC officials seem to have been able to act pretty much at their discretion. They often consulted particular unions in the case of industrially specific regulations, but even then, took the major responsibility for dealing with their government counterparts. They also dealt with many individual grievances and minor administrative claims which were funnelled to them by affiliated unions.<sup>17</sup>

Although protests against the 1 January 1935 scales of assistance and the part played by the Council's staff in the administration of the Act alleviated the lot of those obliged to seek unemployment assistance, there remained

the bitter humiliation of the means test: one of the most devilish methods of breaking the spirit of the working people. Those who defended the means test when the Regulations were under discussion in Parliament, have no conception of the passionate resentment among working people . . . The effect of the means test on the life of the household smitten by unemployment is wholly bad. It destroys the unity of family life, breaks the bonds of natural affection, introduces dissension and conflict between members of the family . . . We hate it with the same intensity as we hate the thought of the workhouse.<sup>18</sup>

However, the protests of the unions could not shift the government from its position—that payments to those who had exhausted their unemployment benefit were not a right secured by the payment of contributions, but a grant, and that the total means of the household, including savings and the earnings of all its members, had to be assessed in order to determine the eligibility of the claimant.

Amending Acts to modify the system of unemployment insurance had been required in every year in the previous decade, except 1929. There had been three Acts in 1931, but none in 1932 or 1933. The 1934 Act was followed by a Consolidating Act in 1935, and in 1936 the statutory

<sup>16</sup> Sidney Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914–1967*, second edn. (London: Arnold, 1969), 253.

<sup>17</sup> Ross M. Martin, *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group 1868–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 233.

<sup>18</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1936), 71 (President's Address). It was not uncommon for 'sons and daughters' to 'move into lodgings in order not to be "dragged down" by having to support their parents' (Mowat, 484).

committee produced a bill to extend the system to agriculture which had previously been excluded. The General Council had supported the Agricultural Workers' demand for this extension for some time. Generally it took the view that special schemes were undesirable since they would lead to 'disintegration of the main scheme and the loss of valuable experience gained in its administration';<sup>19</sup> but it was ready to allow that the low-paid agricultural workers should have lower contributions and benefits than other contributors; and the bill in fact proposed to apply 'the 1935 Act to agriculture with certain specific variations, on such matters as the number of qualifying contributions, the amount of weekly contribution, the amounts of weekly benefit and the duration of benefit, but did not introduce any new principles, or separate agriculture administratively from the other insured industries, except as regards finance'.<sup>20</sup> Further Acts were passed in 1938 and 1939 making minor modifications in the general scheme.

In 1934 the Home Office appointed a departmental committee to review the system of double day-shift working which had been permitted for women and young persons since 1920 and to consider whether it should be allowed to continue. The law, of course, permitted men to work shifts, whether on a two-shift, three-shift, or continuous-shift basis. The Council had always objected to double day-shift working for women and young persons. It asserted that workers on the second shift, working only five shifts a week, were in many cases paid only for the hours worked which meant a considerable loss of pay compared with six periods of eight hours a week on the first shift; and that in many instances workers were not eligible for cheap fares. Although the system was not supposed to be introduced unless the workers concerned had agreed to it, in many instances there had been no proper ballot. The workers were 'called together and asked if they agree to do shift work, or they are canvassed by a foreman or a departmental manager. The workers usually offer no objections in these circumstances, particularly as they are given the impression that the two shift system is an alternative to dismissal.' Above all, 'the system is definitely injurious to health, particularly in the case of young persons'.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless the departmental committee's report, in May 1935, recommended that the system be made permanent, subject, as before, to official permission in each case and to 'the consent of the majority of the workpeople concerned . . . except in the case of the establishment of new works designed to be worked in whole or in part on the two-shift system as a permanent part of its organisation'.<sup>22</sup> A bill was submitted to Parliament the following

<sup>19</sup> General Council, *Minute* (10 Oct. 1934).

<sup>20</sup> Frank Tillyard, *The Worker and the State* (London: Routledge, 1948), 145.

<sup>21</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1935), 139-41.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 141.



year, and unsuccessfully opposed by the Parliamentary Labour Party on its second reading. Its only successes were in committee where the consent of the workers concerned at a secret ballot was made a requirement before an order could be made, and the Home Secretary was obliged to impose such conditions as were necessary for safeguarding the welfare and interests of the persons employed on shifts.

The Council continued to press the case for a revision of the Fair Wages Resolution on the Minister of Labour.<sup>23</sup> It was assisted by 'internal memoranda of the Ministry's officials' which 'supply a fascinating series of indications of the growing realisation that the incongruity between an out-dated Resolution and the current collective bargaining system must be remedied'.<sup>24</sup> The strength of its case was acknowledged in 1937 when the minister set up a departmental committee to consider the working of the resolution and 'to advise whether any changes are desirable and practicable'. Four members of the Council and its assistant general secretary, Tewson, were appointed to the committee, and a deputation from the Council presented its case on 8 November 1937, when it emphasized that 'the district basis of the clause is inapplicable to industries in which agreements are national'; and the need to 'cover such matters as holidays with pay, overtime rates, night work, payment by results when they are embodied in agreements', and for contractors to supply names of subcontractors.<sup>25</sup> However, the committee ceased to function after its chairman went to the United States in 1938.<sup>26</sup>

The Council's concern with government action was not limited to improving the conditions of the unemployed and of those at work. It wanted the government to create jobs to get the unemployed back to work; and within the narrow limits of what it thought possible, the government tried to do so. Its chosen instrument was, of course, tariffs. In addition, special help was given to specific industries, such as the 'scrap and build' programme for shipbuilding. Another approach was to concentrate attention on the areas with high unemployment. In 1934 the government appointed two Members of Parliament and two businessmen to survey the 'depressed areas'. Their report in November was followed almost immediately by the introduction of the Depressed Areas (Development and Improvement) Bill, which, re-entitled 'Special Areas' by the House of Lords, was enacted before the end of the year. This commendable speed was not matched by the substance of the Act. Only four areas were recognized as 'special': industrial Scotland, South

<sup>23</sup> In 1942 it agreed a revision with the employers' Confederation but Treasury opposition meant 'little progress was made': Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1942), 95.

<sup>24</sup> Brian Bercusson, *Fair Wages Resolutions* (London: Mansell, 1978), 187.

<sup>25</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1938), 237-8.

<sup>26</sup> Bercusson, 216.

Wales, West Cumberland, and Tyneside (but not Teesside). Two commissioners were appointed, one for Scotland and one for England and Wales, to initiate and support 'the economic development and social improvement of the distressed areas', with narrowly limited powers and a grant of only £2 million. Their powers were increased by further legislation in 1936 and 1937 which enabled them, among other things, to establish industrial estates to attract firms to the special areas, but they had not achieved very much in this way by the beginning of the war, which led to a radical change in the employment situation.

The General Council was scathing in its comments on the original Act. In a special report to Congress in 1935, it asserted that 'Nothing less is needed than a comprehensive reorganisation of the special areas, and the Commissioners must be put in a position to initiate it and ensure that it is effectively carried out. They must be given the necessary co-ordinating powers, real power of initiative, sufficient funds, and freedom from red tape and orthodox Treasury control.' It drew attention to the failure of the commissioner for England and Wales, despite his efforts, to attract new industry to the special areas and concluded that 'The outstanding need . . . is to establish conditions whereby industry will be attracted to instead of repelled from the special areas.' But it stopped short of recommending 'compulsory location of industry, which would involve national planning machinery not now in existence'.<sup>27</sup>

The Labour Party went further. In 1936 it set up its own Distressed Areas Commission, chaired by Hugh Dalton, then the chairman of the National Executive Committee. Its scope was extended to include Durham and Lancashire, and its programme included preliminary conferences and visits to all the areas covered. 'Altogether this has proved to be one of the most striking and successful projects undertaken by the Party. The well-attended Preliminary Conferences created widespread interest; and the invitation to prepare and submit written evidence on local industrial and social conditions met with a very large response.'<sup>28</sup> In their first (interim) report the commissioners had already proposed a minister for the special areas with power 'to require all new industries or factories (or substantial extensions of existing industrial concerns) to establish themselves in some part of the Special Areas, unless they can prove to his satisfaction that there is a conclusive and overwhelming case for their going elsewhere'.<sup>29</sup>

One measure for increasing the number of jobs available in which the Council took a strong interest was the introduction of a forty-hour working week instead of the forty-seven- or forty-eight-hour week that was the current standard for manual workers in Britain. Well aware of

<sup>27</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1935), app. E, 481-9. <sup>28</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1937), 20.

<sup>29</sup> Labour Party Distressed Areas Commission, *Interim Report* (Jan. 1937).

how its members would respond to a proposal to such a cut in hours of work with hourly rates of pay unaltered, it proposed that when the forty-hour week was introduced, hourly rates should be adjusted so that weekly pay remained the same as before. It was also aware that such an arrangement would lead to a substantial increase in labour costs. In the long run it might lead to increases in productivity which could offset some of those costs, but the initial effect would be to make British goods uncompetitive in foreign markets. However, that could be avoided if other countries introduced a similar adjustment at the same time. The Council therefore proposed that the International Labour Organisation adopt a convention in favour of a forty-hour working week which member countries would be expected to follow. One of the outstanding achievements of the organization had been the adoption of a convention on the forty-eight-hour working week at its conference in Washington in November 1919.<sup>30</sup> Known generally as the 'Washington Convention', it had been widely followed in member states, in some by legislation, but in Britain by collective agreements industry by industry. It seemed plausible to suggest that the organization could now achieve a similar response for a forty-hour convention.

The General Council's International Committee reported to the Council on 25 April 1934 on a meeting with the Minister of Labour, Sir Henry Betterton, at which it had put the Council's ideas to him. The Council decided to tell the minister that it was dissatisfied with his attitude. However, in June he was replaced by Oliver Stanley, who launched his own initiative on 'the absorption of the unemployed'. On 14 December the Council of the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations discussed a request from him for a meeting on this topic, 'with particular reference to the question of reducing Hours of Work'. In its view, it decided, the result would be 'increased unemployment and particularly so in the exporting industries'. On 24 January 1935 he met the General Council, and asked whether it was 'quite definitely' opposed to reducing working hours unless weekly wages were maintained. Citrine replied that they were definitely opposed, but otherwise 'only too anxious to co-operate', and urged him 'not to make the mistake of being led into interminable investigation regarding the supposed effect of a reduction of hours upon industry, as this could lead nowhere'. Despite this warning, Stanley proceeded to a series of meetings with employers in individual industries, which, as Citrine had predicted, led nowhere. Meanwhile the International Labour Organisation had taken up the issue. In 1934 the necessary two-thirds majority could not be obtained to pass a convention, but over the winter the International

<sup>30</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 282.

Labour Office and the governing body of the organization prepared a general convention dealing with the forty-hour working week, and a series of separate conventions to apply the principle to particular industries. Forewarned of this programme, the Confederation of Employers' Organizations had sent a deputation on 19 September 1934 to the Ministry of Labour to urge 'the necessity for the Geneva proposals being opposed by the British Government',<sup>31</sup> and it became clear that the employers' representatives generally were opposed 'to the whole principle of a Convention for the reduction of hours of work' and 'were not prepared to take any responsibility for the preparation of Conventions' for individual industries.<sup>32</sup>

At the conference of the organization in June a committee including Bevin and three other members of the General Council drafted a convention of principle which was adopted by 75 votes to 27, well above the two-thirds majority required. The conference then turned to individual industries. Five were under discussion: coalmining, iron and steel, public works, building, and glass-bottle manufacture. The miners' representatives reported that, for technical reasons of shifts and spread-overs, they did not believe the general convention met their needs, and their case was deferred for discussion the next year, along with that of iron and steel. The draft convention for public works received 61 votes to 38, and that for building 57 to 40, both well short of two-thirds majorities. The one victory for the workers' representatives was the 72 to 34 vote for the convention on the glass-bottle industry. No mention was made in the conventions for individual industries of the maintenance of weekly wages when the forty-hour working week was introduced. That was held to be adequately covered by the general convention,<sup>33</sup> on which the British government representative abstained from voting, with the consequence, as William Kean, the president, reported to Congress in September, that 'it was signed by almost every country in the world of any industrial importance, save only this country, our country, which ought to have led the way'.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, there had been another change at the Ministry of Labour. Ernest Brown had replaced Oliver Stanley, and it was he who met the General Council on 25 July 1935 to report the progress of discussions with employers in individual British industries. Using a cautious double negative, he told it that 'all indications are not unfavourable'. Asked whether the government would introduce legislation or regulations if it was satisfied that reducing hours of labour or restricting overtime would reduce unemployment, the minister replied that 'this would follow as a

<sup>31</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (4 Dec. 1934).

<sup>32</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1935), 162.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 164-5.



matter of course'. But, he said, whatever was done in Britain must be 'in the light of our internal capacity', since 'it had to be accepted that other countries were not prepared to reduce hours and at the same time maintain wages'. On 29 August the Council decided to tell Congress that it was 'of opinion that they could not carry on the discussions [with the Minister] to any useful purpose', but that he might ask individual unions to meet him. If so, they 'should decide, in view of their own circumstances, what course of action they should take'.

In October Brown told the Council that he believed that progress could best be made by negotiating voluntary agreements on 'the hours reduction question' at least 'in the first place', adding that 'the Government had no intention of taking the matter out of the hands of the International Labour Organisation, but they thought their proposal would be an improvement on the existing procedure'.<sup>35</sup> He suggested starting with iron and steel and building, but gave no indication that the British employers in those industries were willing to co-operate. He made a similar proposal in a speech to the International Labour Conference on 9 June 1936, telling the delegates that 'The need for entering into an obligation to introduce compulsory measures cannot be determined until we have seen how far there can be voluntary agreement'.<sup>36</sup> That statement was conclusively disproved almost immediately by the employers' spokesman who told the conference that, although the employers were now willing to take part in the committees drafting conventions for individual industries, they had not changed their policy: 'We still remain convinced of the inefficacy of these proposals both for economic reasons, and as a means of curing unemployment. We feel, too, that these proposals will not be universally applied, as is shown by the replies of the Governments to the questionnaires'.<sup>37</sup> Four draft conventions were put before the conference. Three failed to get a two-thirds vote: building, iron and steel, and coalmining; but public works scraped home with 79 to 38.

Three more draft conventions were put before the 1937 conference: for chemicals, printing, and textiles. The first two failed to secure a two-thirds majority, but textiles received 88 votes to 41.<sup>38</sup> In fact the size of the vote made no practical difference, for no country introduced a forty-hour working week in any industry as a result of a decision of the International Labour Organisation. The forty-hour week was the norm already in North America; and it was introduced in the main industries in France, except for agriculture, in 1936-7. This, however, was not a consequence of the work of the International Labour Organisation, but

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 71.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 173.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* (1936), 170.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 172.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* (1937), 167-8.

of the wave of stay-in strikes that followed the victory of the Popular Front in the election of 1936. These strikes were settled by the Matignon Agreement between the employers' confederation and the union confederation which included provision for a forty-hour working week, which was subsequently embodied in law by the government of Leon Blum. It remained in force until the war, but its effects disappointed the unions and the government. Initially unemployment fell slightly but rose again in the autumn of 1937; and output fell,<sup>39</sup> contributing to the economic crisis that brought the government down.

Several British unions tried to engage their employers in negotiations over a claim for a forty-hour working week without loss of pay, but although the printing, hosiery, and footwear employers agreed to reductions in the length of the working week below forty-eight hours, no other successes were achieved. Bryn Roberts was eager for an approach to be made to all the local-authority services to ask for a forty-hour working week; and in January 1935 the proposal was discussed at a conference of the relevant union executives at Transport House. Roberts wanted to 'enforce the 40-hour week wherever we have the opportunity', but the General and Municipal Workers 'contended that it would be unwise to proceed until they knew "the mind of the Government"', and the Transport and General Workers agreed.<sup>40</sup> When the proposal came up again in 1939, Dukes put his objections to the General and Municipal Workers' executive more forcibly, saying 'it would be wholly impossible for the overwhelming majority of public authorities to meet the claim for a forty-hour week without loss of earnings. . . . He stressed the fact that the great majority of workers concerned would undoubtedly prefer an increase in wages rather than a reduction of hours.'<sup>41</sup> Why did the Council spend so much time and energy pursuing the forty-hour working week without loss of pay as a remedy for unemployment? It quickly found out that the British government was not going to do anything for it in this respect, so it was understandable that it should turn its attention to the International Labour Organisation; but it also became clear that there were no substantial gains to be had there either, so long as the employers were solidly against the proposal for a reduction in hours with no reduction in weekly pay. Arthur Hayday, the British workers' representative on the governing body of the organization, told Congress in 1934 that, at the International Labour Conference in 1933, 'Some employers said if we would take the 40 hour week without increasing the wages bill in industry, they would have been quite willing to enter some arrangement

<sup>39</sup> Georges Lefranc, *Histoire du Front Populaire, 1934-1938* (Paris: Payot, 1965), 319-21.

<sup>40</sup> National Union of Public Employees, Executive, *Minutes* (16 Feb. 1935).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* (25 May 1939).

with a view to the adoption of the 40 hours Convention.<sup>42</sup> That would have been the price of effective use of the forty-hour working week to reduce unemployment. But trade union leaders who agreed to such a proposal would have been repudiated by their members. The whole campaign was nothing but propaganda to assure the members that it was doing something about unemployment.

However, not all attempts to reform conditions of employment by conventions of the International Labour Organisation proved as ineffective as the campaign for the forty-hour week. Immediately after its report to Congress on the fate of the draft conventions intended to introduce a forty-hour working week into chemicals, printing, and textiles, the General Council gave an account of the International Maritime Conference in October 1936, when Bevin served as an adviser to the National Union of Seamen and took a major part in the presentation of the union case. Six conventions were adopted, on hours of work, annual holidays, insurance against sickness, the shipowner's liability in case of sickness, injury, or death, professional requirements of masters and officers, and the minimum age of employment at sea. The hours of work were to be not forty a week, but forty-eight with an eight-hour day in port, and fifty-six hours for staff organized in watches at sea.<sup>43</sup> 'Taken together', the six conventions 'constituted the international charter for which the seamen's unions had campaigned, without success, since the first ILO Maritime Conference of 1920'.<sup>44</sup>

In the same year the main conference of the International Labour Organisation in June adopted, by 99 votes to 15, a general convention on annual holidays with pay. On this issue also the employers had objected to legislation, preferring collective agreements; but clearly not many of them had carried their objections to the extent of an adverse vote. As a consequence, in March 1937 the British government appointed a committee of inquiry, chaired by Lord Amulree, which estimated that 7.75 million manual and non-manual workers earning less than £250 a year in Britain enjoyed annual holidays. It recommended that trade boards and other statutory wage-fixing bodies should be empowered to give directions providing for paid holidays for workers for whom the board or other statutory body prescribed minimum wages. In other industries it preferred that the matter be handled through collective agreements, but proposed that the Minister of Labour should assist industries that wanted advice; and that legislation for the general application of holidays with pay should be introduced in the 1940-1 parliamentary session. The Holidays with Pay Act 1938 dealt with paid

<sup>42</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1934), 317.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* (1937), 168-9.

<sup>44</sup> Bullock, i. 576.

holidays in statutory wage-fixing bodies, and, although general legislation was not introduced because of the war, the Ministry of Labour believed that by 1943 the number corresponding to the 7.75 million with annual holidays in 1938 was 'probably in the neighbourhood of 15 millions'.<sup>45</sup>

From time to time the Council looked forward to more distant objectives, which for it meant the construction of a socialist Britain through the nationalization of industry. For the 1934 meeting of Congress, the Economic Committee prepared a report on *The Socialization of the Iron and Steel Industry*. Acknowledging the complex structure of the industry, the report rejected management by a government department, proposing a public corporation appointed by the relevant minister instead. This corporation should take over from existing firms 'their iron and steel producing plants', paying compensation at 'reasonable net maintainable revenue', and should organize them under subordinate boards for each section of the industry. Prices were to be fixed by the main board in conjunction with 'a body representing the interests of consumers, the Minister having final power of decision in case of dispute'.

So far these proposals accord closely to the pattern of nationalization that was under discussion at the time in the Labour Party, which the post-war Labour government subsequently adopted.<sup>46</sup> However, in relation to the trade unions, the 1934 report made recommendations not contemplated after the war. The steel unions were to be completely unified and their organization 'must conform to that of the industry'. In addition to that revolutionary suggestion, plans for industrial relations included works councils in the plants, which were to represent 'managerial and technical staff' in addition to 'rank and file workers through their Trade Unions', and to consult on 'workshop practice and discipline, safety and health conditions, recreation of young workers, promotion etc.'. The right to strike should remain 'but must be reduced to the remotest possibility by . . . adequate machinery of adjustment from the workshop upward'. Above all, 'A healthy . . . workshop self-discipline must be developed, in which authority is related to merit rather than to social distinctions. It must be the discipline inseparable from successful team work embodying the spirit of the sports field.' This would be possible, since 'the dividend motive being no longer regarded as its mainspring, a real co-partnership can be achieved'.<sup>47</sup>

These proposals were followed fairly closely in reports on the

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Industrial Relations Handbook* (1944), 171.

<sup>46</sup> The minutes of the Economic Committee give no indication as to how this convergence of party and trade union ideas came about.

<sup>47</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1934), 189-205.



socialization of the cotton<sup>48</sup> and coal industries.<sup>49</sup> They too were to be managed by public corporations with subordinate boards, in cotton for spinning, manufacturing, finishing, and marketing, and in coalmining regional boards and a marketing board. Like the steel unions, their unions were to be required to unify themselves in an organization 'which must conform to that of the industry' and must help to develop a 'healthy discipline of workshop self-government'. There was, however, one difference between the proposals for steel and cotton and those for coal. At the 1934 Congress, Charles Dukes had called attention to a resolution passed by the Labour Party conference in the previous year requiring that 50 per cent of the members of the boards of nationalized industries should represent the workers in the industry and carried a resolution asking for 'united action' by the Labour Party and Congress.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly the Economic Committee held two meetings with the Policy Committee of the Labour Party and reported to Congress in 1935 that

On examination it was made clear that the only real point at issue was whether the right of the Workers' organisations to be represented on the Governing Boards of socialised industries and services should or should not be secured by Statute. It was finally agreed that this right should be secured by Statute and this recommendation has been adopted both by the General Council and by the Executive of the Labour Party.<sup>51</sup>

The report on the steel industry in 1934 had proposed that works councils should make nominations to the sectional boards and that the trade unions should be consulted on appointments to these boards and to the national board. The report on cotton, which had presumably been completed before the reconciliation of the Council's views with those of the party executive, also proposed that the unions should be consulted on appointments to the sectional boards and the national board, but the formula in the report on the coal industry in 1936 was that 'Statutory provision would be made for the representation of the workers in the industry on the Corporation and its subsidiary Boards.'<sup>52</sup> A similar form of words was used in the evidence that the Council gave, also in 1936, to the McGowan Committee on Electricity Distribution which proposed a national board to take over generation and transmission through the national grid, with regional boards to control distribution.<sup>53</sup> However, there were no more exercises in planning the socialist future after 1936, and the Council gave its full attention, as it had always given most of its attention, to current issues.

In the years before the war the General Council had considerable

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* (1935), 202-8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* (1936), 210-13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* (1934), 271.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* (1935), 211.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* (1936), 212.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* (1936), 220.

influence on legislation, but not necessarily more than in the years immediately after the First World War, or than that of the Parliamentary Committee following the election of 1906, or even, for that matter, in the 1870s;<sup>54</sup> but its influence on the administration of government was certainly greater than it had ever been before. Under Citrine, the Council and its staff paid more attention to influencing administration than in the past, and they were better equipped for it: 'The TUC's staff was sufficiently diversified to allow the development of steady "opposite number" relationships. This facilitated dealings with civil servants which were not limited to matters of detail, but often extended to preliminary soundings on larger issues.'<sup>55</sup> More attention was paid to Council members and to members of their staff:

During the six years to the end of 1937, the General Council was officially represented in more than 60 ministerial deputations of a formal nature, including those shared with the Labour party: there were only a dozen similar deputations during the three years of Conservative rule up to mid-1929. And sometimes . . . the initiative for *ad hoc* consultation came from government leaders themselves during this time.<sup>56</sup>

For instance, Baldwin invited Citrine and his wife to visit Chequers in November 1936 so that he could consult him over the abdication crisis.<sup>57</sup>

The award of knighthoods to Citrine and Arthur Pugh in the honours list of July 1935 was another recognition of the importance of the Council; as was the offer of a knighthood to Bevin, who refused it. Honours of a lesser status had been awarded to trade union leaders before, but not a knighthood to a serving trade union officer. The news of these knighthoods created a stir in the Labour Movement. At Congress in September 1935, Anne Godwin moved that 'Congress regrets that active leaders of the Trade Union Movement should accept honours at the hands of a Government which is not established in the interests of the workers'. After Citrine had defended himself at length, the 'previous question' was moved and carried, on a show of hands, by 237 to 125.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> For trade union influence on legislation in the 1870s, see H. A. Clegg, Alan Fox, and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1880*, i. 1889-1910 (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 52; in 1906, see *ibid.* 394-7; in 1919-20, see Clegg, *History*, ii. 239-52.

<sup>55</sup> Martin, 238; see Ch. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Martin, 238.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Citrine, *Men and Work* (London, Hutchinson, 1964), 323-6.

<sup>58</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1935), 426-34. At the Labour Party conference in October the National Executive was instructed to inquire into 'the conditions and restrictions' under which 'Socialist' participation in honours might be sanctioned (Labour Party *Report* (1935), 238-40); and the executive reported next year, somewhat pompously: 'It would be impossible for the Labour Movement to lay down a binding rule which would bar individuals from accepting Honours. A ruling of this kind could only be enforced by expulsion from the Party, and if any Honours are to be recognised at all, the Movement would be called upon to differentiate between Honours which

Dealings between the government and the General Council were also influenced by the government's economic ideas and policies. The government was prepared not only to assist in the extension of collective bargaining, as Chapter 1 has shown, and to make concessions on factory legislation and on unemployment insurance and assistance. It also believed that it was possible for government action to boost employment, and was prepared to take some steps to do so. The change was noted in the presidential address to Congress in 1935 of William Kean, the general secretary of the tiny Union of Gold and Silver Trades, who, wrote Citrine, 'excellent and loyal fellow though he was, was not an outstanding personality'; and whose speech therefore probably benefited more than most presidential addresses from the assistance of the Council's staff. 'Trade union recovery', he told Congress,

is most marked, I think, in the change that is taking place in the attitude of people towards the social and economic policy our movement has advocated. Economic planning and social control of the mechanism of industry and trade are no longer regarded as the impracticable dream of Trade Unionists and Socialists—they are principles which capitalist Governments and employers' organisations recognise and accept. Not in theory only, but in practice, the unbridled individualism which determined the policy of Governments in the past has been discarded. To be sure, the principles of economic planning are not applied by existing Governments as we want to see them applied. In the measures so far taken we can find no assurance that the workless people who have found jobs after prolonged spells of unemployment are now permanently reinstated.<sup>59</sup>

Despite this qualification, there remained plenty of room for co-operation between government and unions, which the General Council was eager to occupy. This was certainly true of Bevin and Citrine, who continued to dominate the General Council in this period, as they had done since the General Strike. They were the two most remarkable leaders that the British trade union movement has ever produced. They were very different men: Bevin, imaginative, generous (though he could also be domineering), passionate, and a forceful speaker whose message came across clearly through his often confused phrasing; and Citrine, deliberate, systematic, calculating, and a speaker who persuaded by carefully marshalled information and arguments. They did not even like each other, but their partnership was strikingly effective. 'Our ideas', wrote Citrine,

could and could not be accepted—a task which would not be without serious difficulties.' The reference back of this part of the executive's report was moved, and carried on a show of hands, by 185 to 174, which left the whole subject up in the air—perhaps the best place for it (*ibid.* (1936), app. 7 and p. 257).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* (1935), 70.

were so closely related, our thinking so closely parallel, that without any formal collaboration we reached similar conclusions. We were different in many ways. Bevin read practically nothing about trade union theory or economics. He didn't need to. His native intelligence and flair taught him many things that were not to be found in textbooks or in the dogma of economic theorists. He had great drive and a measure of ruthlessness that I did not possess. He was subjective in practically all he did; he personalised almost everything. . . .

The occasions on which Bevin and I discussed policy outside the Council chamber might be counted on one hand, certainly on two. Yet the occasions on which we differed on essentials could, I believe, have been counted within a still smaller compass. Sometimes Bevin would turn up late for a Council meeting. Meantime I had been expounding a certain line of action. . . . Bevin would come in and, without the slightest knowledge of what I had said, would traverse and support the views I had expressed with an uncanny similarity of reasoning. . . . I cannot now recall a single issue of first-class importance on which we seriously differed. On tactics, yes, but not on basic policy. So, without external collaboration, we worked together to increase the influence of the T.U.C., to establish its right to consultation in the national sphere, and to make it a centre with power to evolve policy and take decisions on general principles affecting the trade union movement as a whole.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the powerful influence that Bevin and Citrine exercised over the General Council, the rest of the Council were not nonentities. Next to them should be placed Charles Dukes, secretary of the General and Municipal Workers. His career as a full-time officer with that union began in 1911 as the secretary of the Warrington branch. By 1925 he was secretary of the union's largest district, Lancashire, with a seat on the union's national executive, where he soon emerged as the most powerful figure in the union. The general secretary was the legendary Will Thorne, who had held the post since 1889. The union had laid down no retirement age for its full-time officers; but in 1934 the executive told Thorne that he must go. He assented, and the election of Dukes as his successor was a foregone conclusion. One item in the thoroughgoing reorganization that Dukes was determined to carry through was compulsory retirement for full-time officers at 65, but, characteristically, he moved slowly. The new rule was not introduced until 1936, after which he took the opportunity to reconstruct the districts, and to strengthen the authority of the national officers who looked after the interests of the members of the union in the many industries in which they worked. These achievements and his contributions to the General Council of Congress established his reputation as

<sup>60</sup> Citrine, i. 238-40. A rather different picture is painted in Bullock, i. 427, where he writes that, following Bevin's service on the Macmillan Committee on Finance and Industry (1929-30), 'if Bevin was apt to believe too readily that he "knew all about" banking and currency afterwards, there is no doubt that he acquired far more knowledge of them than most trade-union leaders'.



the third most powerful figure in the trade union movement. However, he was not only a powerful man. He was a thoughtful man. If he had an important speech to make or a crucial decision to take, he would drive into the country to spend the day walking and brooding until he was sure what he should do or say.

Among the other members of the Council, George Hicks, described by the *Dictionary of National Biography*<sup>61</sup> as having a 'Rabelaisian flavour', fond of food and drink, could be cantankerous in his cups, but he was a ready and humorous speaker and a capable general secretary of the Building Trade Workers. By contrast, Arthur Pugh of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation was abstemious and no orator. He read his speeches, but was a skilful negotiator and conciliator. John Marchbank, who succeeded Cramp as general secretary of the Railwaymen in 1933, was another outstanding negotiator. 'Immaculately dressed, debonair and a great favourite with the ladies', he was nevertheless 'at his best in negotiations with the companies'.<sup>62</sup> With the exception of Pugh, these men had in common with many other members of the Council, including Bevin and Citrine, and two of the Miners' representatives, Ebby Edwards and Will Lawther, the fact that they had been associated with the left-wing semi-revolutionary organizations that had flourished among British trade-unionists before, during, and immediately after the First World War, notably the British Socialist Party (the forerunner of the Communist Party), the syndicalist and industrial-unionist movements, and the shop-steward movement.<sup>63</sup> Subsequent experience of economic depression and the failure of the General Strike had taught them to pursue their objectives by means other than class warfare and strikes—by building up their influence with employers and the government through organization and argument.

Agreement on this strategy was facilitated by the unusual continuity of service recorded by the members of the General Council elected for the year 1933-4. Seventeen of the thirty-two members of that Council had been replaced by 1938, but seventeen of them had been on the Council for ten years, and no fewer than fifteen since 1921, when the General Council, with enlarged membership, had replaced the old Parliamentary Committee as the executive body of Congress. Subsequent recruits to the Council showed little inclination to challenge the established outlook which they found there. There were remarkably few occasions on which the General Council found it necessary to take a vote on an issue of substance. There were routine votes to select members of subcommittees and nominees to government bodies, and to choose the venue for the

<sup>61</sup> Vol. for 1951-60, 474.

<sup>62</sup> Bagwell, 541.

<sup>63</sup> On these bodies see Clegg, *History*, ii. 189-94, 309-11.

next Congress. There were also occasional votes about whether the Council should meet ministers and employers. For example, on 23 July 1934 John Bromley and John Hill recalled their militant past by moving that the Council should not agree to the Minister of Labour's request to see them on the question of the forty-hour working week, and should tell him that they had no confidence in the government 'so long as their present attitude was in the ascendant'; but there were no supporters. On 26 November 1938 the Council agreed by 22 votes to 4 to discuss air-raid precautions with the National Council of Employers' Organizations; and on 26 April 1939 it agreed by 17 votes to 7 to meet the Prime Minister to hear from him the government's proposal to introduce compulsory military training; but also to tell him that 'their policy on conscription was defined'.

An unusual problem arose on 21 December 1938 when the vacancy on the Council resulting from the resignation of Joseph Jones of the Miners' Federation had to be filled. Had the election in the mining and quarrying group been contested at the previous Congress, the seat would have gone to the runner-up, but, as there had been no contest, standing orders prescribed that the Council must choose from nominations made by the unions in the group. There were four nominees, including Arthur Horner, the Communist president of the South Wales Miners, nominated by the Miners' Federation. The Council discussed whether a Communist could be ruled ineligible, without reaching a conclusion, but the matter was resolved by proceeding to an election, in which Horner received 3 votes against 18 for R. W. Williams, general secretary of the North Wales Quarrymen, with 6 votes between the two remaining candidates. Perhaps the most significant vote of these years was the rejection on 27 May 1936 by 13 votes to 8 of the recommendation of the Finance and General Purposes Committee to reallocate seats on the Council between union groups. There were good reasons for making the change,<sup>64</sup> but it would have upset powerful unions.

As the decade advanced, increasing involvement in dealings with the government and government departments added to the work-load of its members. Between 1932 and 1937 the Council 'sponsored some 50 ministerial deputations, apart from those mounted jointly with the Labour Party. Most of them consisted either wholly or mainly of General Council members.' The same principle, of choosing members of the Council, was applied 'whenever it was asked for nominations to government bodies of any consequence'.<sup>65</sup> The application of the principle to the Holidays with Pay Committee, which included equal

<sup>64</sup> See above.

<sup>65</sup> Martin, 234.

numbers of employer and union representatives, involved the service of six members of the Council on a single body, all but one of them general secretaries of major unions. In 1933-4 twenty-three of the thirty-two members of the Council were general secretaries of their unions, and in 1938-9 the number was twenty-two. In most instances their unions were big unions. In the latter year they included the two general unions, the Miners, the Railwaymen, the Distributive Workers, the Building Trade Workers, the Woodworkers, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the Cotton Weavers, the Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, and the Boot and Shoe Operatives, each with well over 50,000 members, and together totalling nearly 2.7 million out of 4.46 million members in unions affiliated to Congress. Had this not been so, and had the General Council not commanded a majority of votes at Congress, they would not have been able to serve as an effective cabinet of Congress, or as the spokesmen for the trade union movement. However, there was a cost involved. The job of a trade union general secretary is onerous, especially in a major union, and to add to that the responsibility of membership of the General Council as that responsibility had developed in the 1930s was to make it considerably more onerous, despite all the assistance their own unions and the staff of Congress could provide for them.

### *The Labour Party*

The Trades Union Congress is a federal body consisting of independent trade unions, each of them autonomous in its own sphere, especially in the conduct of collective bargaining. The Labour Party has a more complex structure. As far as the unions are concerned, it is another federal body, through which they can deal with political issues, if they choose to affiliate to it. That is also true of other affiliated national organizations, which at that time included several socialist societies and the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, the Constituency Labour Parties were local agencies of the Labour Party, with no independent existence of their own. All three types of organization—affiliated unions, other nationally affiliated organizations, and constituency parties—were entitled to send delegates to the annual conference of the party, which until 1937 was held after Congress, in the first week of October; and to take part in the election of the National Executive Committee. This body consisted—also up to 1937—of the leader of the parliamentary party *ex officio*, the treasurer (elected by

<sup>66</sup> Other co-operative societies were affiliated to the Co-operative Party, which was 'associated' with the Labour Party.

conference in a separate ballot), and nine trade union nominees, one nominee of the socialist societies, five nominees of the constituency parties, and four women nominees, all elected by conference as a whole. By convention, members of the General Council were not nominated for the National Executive; and as the general secretaries of major unions preferred to belong to the General Council rather than the National Executive, the trade union membership of the latter had the appearance of a 'second eleven'. Like the General Council, the National Executive chose its chairman by seniority, and he or she also presided at the annual conference; but in the party the chairman had served as vice-chairman in the previous year, whereas in the General Council the vice-chairmanship came the year afterwards.

Under the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 trade unions were limited to collecting contributions to their political funds from those members who had positively agreed to contribute. Even so, they were the paymasters of the Labour Party. In 1935 they affiliated to the party on 1.9 million members as against 3.37 million to the Trades Union Congress. Part of the difference is due to unions, mostly small unions, that affiliated to Congress but not to the party; but the party-affiliation figure cannot be taken as a precise record of the number of trade-unionists who had 'contracted in', for some unions did not affiliate on the total number of their members who had done so, preferring to add some of those contributions to the part of their political fund that they kept for other purposes, such as assisting their own Members of Parliament and parliamentary candidates, and contributing to other funds raised by the party. Since a general election was held in 1935, the party raised a general-election fund. The total trade union affiliation fees paid to the party that year were £31,951, over 80 per cent of the total affiliation fees of £39,579; and the trade union contribution to the election fund was £12,698, more than half of the total of £22,472. There had always been criticism of the weight carried by the unions in the Labour Party, both at national and at local level. Before 1933 there had been recurrent criticism that trade unions bought parliamentary seats for their nominees by the size of the contributions that they offered to constituency parties towards the salary of the agent and other electoral expenses—beyond the means of any but a well-to-do non-union prospective candidate to match; but this grievance had been reduced by the 'Hastings Agreement' at the 1933 conference, which set limits to contributions made by and on behalf of candidates to constituency-party election expenses and running costs. Nevertheless, other grievances remained: the number of places on the National Executive allotted to the unions in relation to those for the constituencies; and the method of election whereby all sections of conference voted in the election of each



candidate for the executive, so that trade union votes could determine which of the candidates nominated by the constituencies would be elected.

These issues were raised at the 1935 conference, but deferred, and deferred again in 1936; but in 1937 Hugh Dalton, the party chairman, was determined that they should be settled, and had his way. There were six relevant resolutions on the agenda:

- (a) To allow Affiliated Constituency Parties to be represented at the Annual Conference by proxy delegates. . . .
- (b) To increase the membership of the National Executive Committee from 23 to 25 by extending the number of representatives of . . . Constituency Labour Parties . . . from five to seven.
- (c) To provide for the direct and separate election of the Executive Committee members to Division I [trade unions], Division II [socialist societies etc.], Division III [constituency parties] while retaining the present method of electing Division IV [women].
- (d) To omit the representative of the League of Youth from the National Executive.<sup>67</sup>
- (e) To provide that Amendments to the Constitution and Standing Orders should only be considered . . . every third year.
- (f) To provide for the Annual Conference to be held at Whitsuntide.

In addition it was proposed, if the revised composition of the National Executive was approved by the conference, to proceed to elect the new executive on that basis, provided the Conference Arrangements Committee agreed.

During the debate it appeared that the big unions were opposed to the proposals. John Marchbank and Charles Dukes spoke against them, Dukes pointing out that 'the Trade Union affiliated membership outnumbers the Constituency Parties by 5 to 1'.<sup>68</sup> Bevin also spoke. His delegation was 'pretty evenly divided and our votes are not decided'. But there were two things it was 'definitely against'. These were the proxy vote, and the increase in constituency representation. Instead of the proposed increase in representation, it would have preferred to give 'the League of Youth seat to the Constituency Parties'—presumably meaning that they should have only one additional seat instead of two. In addition he begged 'Conference not to adopt the principle of electing on the basis of the new Constitution this week. . . . I . . . fear, and my Union fears, rush tactics in the Labour Party.'<sup>69</sup> When it came to the vote, the proposal for proxies was defeated 'overwhelmingly' on a show of hands. The increase in constituency-party representation was carried by

<sup>67</sup> The Labour League of Youth Advisory Committee had been disbanded in 1936, having 'made clear their hostile attitude to the original purpose of the League' (*Labour Party, Report* (1936), 75).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* (1937), 143.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

1,408,000 votes to 1,134,000. On the plausible assumption that all the constituency-party votes were for the change, the trade union votes must have been divided marginally against it. The remaining listed resolutions were all carried by large majorities; and the proposal to elect the new executive under the revised rules was moved and seconded from the floor of conference, and carried by a similar majority. In his autobiography Dalton said that negotiations with Bevin over lunch had led to the proponents of the new rules dropping the proxy vote in return for Bevin's support for the two extra seats. Dalton continued, with reference to the vote in favour of putting the new rules into operation forthwith: 'This was Dukes and Marchbank getting their own back on Bevin.'<sup>70</sup>

The trade union leaders had feared that the increase in constituency representation, along with 'direct and separate election' would bring left-wing representatives on to the executive. These fears were well founded. There were four new constituency representatives on the executive, and they included Harold Laski, Stafford Cripps, and D. N. Pritt. At any time up to 1932 'the left' in the Labour Party would have been understood to mean primarily the Independent Labour Party, but in the confusion and dismay that followed on the collapse of the Labour government in 1931 the majority of the Independent Labour Party concluded that the cause of the government's failure lay in the inadequacy of the basic philosophy of the Labour Party, rooted in 'gradualism', and at its conference in July 1932 they disaffiliated from it. A minority, however, decided that the Labour Party was not beyond redemption, and that it was better to carry on the campaign for 'Socialism in our Time'<sup>71</sup> inside the party. Later in the year they amalgamated with the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda, which had been formed by Bevin and G. D. H. Cole 'while the Labour Government was still in office in an endeavour to secure the adoption of a well-considered Socialist policy', through research and education.<sup>72</sup> Bevin was not acceptable to the Independent Labour Party faction as chairman of the new body, which was called the Socialist League. It wanted that office for its own man, Frank Wise. In the following year, however, Wise died and Cole left. Stafford Cripps, a successful and wealthy barrister, who had been Solicitor-General in the Labour government, became chairman.

Both the executive of the Labour Party and the leaders of the league

<sup>70</sup> Hugh Dalton, *The Fateful Years* (London: Frederick Muller, 1945), 143.

<sup>71</sup> This was the title of the Independent Labour Party's programme formulated in the mid-twenties.

<sup>72</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948), 282.

gave their attention to the conditions that might ensure that the next Labour government was more successful than the last. This was one of the main topics discussed at the party conferences in 1933 and 1934. They hoped that the next Labour government would be a majority government, but it was not possible to assume that beforehand. Both wanted a wide-ranging programme of nationalization carried through rapidly. Both feared that there might be resistance, for example from the banks and other financial institutions and from the House of Lords, and that the opposition in the House of Commons might exploit parliamentary procedure to thwart the government's legislative programme. The executive's fears also included the danger that future Labour prime ministers and chancellors of the exchequer might follow the example of MacDonald and Snowden. This it proposed to prevent by laying down that the prime minister should be subject to majority decisions of the cabinet, and that a dissolution should be subject to a vote of the parliamentary party; and that financial policy should be determined by the cabinet; but these are not matters on which the league would have differed. With so much in common between them, it might appear that the executive and the league could have agreed on a programme of action for the next Labour government without much difficulty; but they could not do so. The league did not trust the executive which, for it, included many of those responsible for the disaster of 1931—less guilty than MacDonald and Snowden, to be sure, but never to be relied on again; for most of the executive, on the other hand, the members of the league were irresponsible extremists. So, whereas the executive proposed to abolish the House of Lords if it wrecked important measures, the league wanted immediate abolition. Similarly, the league wanted an Emergency Powers Act to authorize the government 'to take over or regulate the financial machine, and to put into force any measures that the situation may require for the immediate control or Socialisation of Industry',<sup>73</sup> whereas the executive proposed a series of nationalization statutes providing for fair compensation. When the executive submitted its programme under the title of 'For Socialism and Peace' to conference in 1934 the league put down seventy-five amendments. This controversy, however, caused little stir within the unions. They were more concerned with the activities of the Communist Party.

There were two important changes in the leadership of the Labour Party in 1935. Arthur Henderson, who had since 1932 spent most of his time and energies on the international Disarmament Conference, of which he was chairman, had resigned the secretaryship of the Labour

<sup>73</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1933), 159.

Party in 1932, and was succeeded by his deputy, J. S. Middleton,<sup>74</sup> but remained treasurer until his death in 1935. George Lansbury had led the parliamentary party since 1931, except for a period of illness when Clement Attlee, his deputy, took over. Lansbury was a pacifist. In 1935 the Labour Party was committed, along with its partners in the National Council of Labour, to a statement they had issued on 24 July of that year asking 'the British Government . . . to declare that it will discharge its duties and obligations as a Member of the League [of Nations] without fear or favour' in relation to the threatened invasion of Abyssinia by Italy. If Italy went ahead with the invasion, these duties and obligations might involve economic sanctions in the first instance, and, if Italy persisted after that, military sanctions. The Abyssinian crisis therefore put both Lansbury and the party in a difficult position. Instead of resolving it for both himself and the party by resigning, Lansbury explained his position to the National Executive Committee on 9 September and withdrew from the meeting. On his return, his colleagues told him, with more compassion than candour, that 'they saw no reason for resignation'. At the party conference three weeks later Lansbury told the delegates that he agreed 'with the position of my friends who say it is quite intolerable that you should have a man speaking as Leader who disagrees fundamentally on an issue of this kind'. Nevertheless he did not announce his resignation, but said instead that 'next Tuesday . . . the Parliamentary Party . . . is meeting, and I hope we shall arrive at a satisfactory solution'.<sup>75</sup> This was the prelude to Bevin's notorious comment: 'It is placing the Executive and the Movement in an absolutely wrong position to be taking your conscience round from body to body asking to be told what you ought to do with it.'<sup>76</sup> The outcome was, of course, that Lansbury resigned, and Attlee took over in time to lead the party through the general election, which was announced on 25 October to take place on 14 November.

Although the Conservatives claimed credit for economic recovery, and the Labour Party asserted that its policies would have brought a more extensive and lasting recovery, as well as a more egalitarian distribution of its benefits, the main issue in the election was the Abyssinian crisis; and on this issue both parties claimed to be the champions of collective security through the League of Nations. Indeed, although the Labour Party might assert that the government could not be relied on to fulfil its obligations—at least not without constant vigilance from the opposition, supported by public pressure—there were also reasons for doubting the Labour Party's devotion to collective

<sup>74</sup> The secretaryship was now made a salaried post, filled by appointment, not, as before, by election.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* (1935), 175.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 178.



security. Until a few weeks before the election the party had been led by a pacifist and there remained a considerable number of pacifists within the party; and the parliamentary party still refused to vote for the service estimates which the government believed the country's defence required. The outcome was a victory for the Conservatives, but not on the same scale as the landslide of 1931. With ten by-election victories, two recruits from other parties, and one Independent taking the party whip, the parliamentary party had risen from forty-six in 1931 to fifty-nine at the dissolution. Their numbers now went up to 154. The Conservatives took 387 seats, and successful 'National Liberal' and 'National Labour'<sup>77</sup> candidates made the overall support for the government up to 431. Another thirty seats went to the Liberals, the Independent Labour Party, and others.

Seventy-nine of the successful Labour candidates were sponsored by their trade unions. The advantage enjoyed by candidates sponsored by trade unions in the search for winnable seats is evident from a comparison between their results and those of candidates sponsored by constituency parties. The unions sponsored 128 candidates with seventy-nine returned, whereas the constituencies sponsored 395 candidates of whom sixty-six were successful. Among the unions, the Miners' Federation were far out in front with thirty-four candidates returned; the Transport and General Workers scored seven successes, the General and Municipal Workers and the Railway Clerks six each, the Distributive and Allied Workers five, and the Railwaymen four. Other unions accounted for the remaining seventeen trade union Members of Parliament. The only other successful sponsoring body was the Co-operative Party with twenty-one candidates, of whom nine were successful.

Interest in foreign affairs did not die away after the election. On the contrary, foreign policy became more and more the central issue in British politics over the next four years. It therefore seems appropriate to finish this brief account of the Labour Party here, and to turn to the development of the foreign policy of the Labour Movement from 1936 onwards.

### *The Labour Movement's Foreign Policy*

In the autumn of 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria. The Chinese government appealed to the League of Nations, which set up a commission to inquire into the matter. Its report, issued at the end of

<sup>77</sup> These two dissident groups had been formed in 1931 to support the 'National' government, led by MacDonald but dominated by the Conservatives.

1932, censured Japan; but no action was taken against her. However, the invasion caused the British government, on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff, to cancel the 'ten year rule', dating back to 1919, under which it was assumed at any one time that there would be no major war for ten years from that date. This decision was taken in March 1932, but no immediate rearmament was undertaken; for that, money had to be voted. Nevertheless the services began to make plans. When Hitler was appointed chancellor in Germany in January 1933, the Chiefs of Staff forecast that Germany would become 'a profound threat to British security within three to five years'.<sup>78</sup> Emphasis therefore switched from the navy, which would have had to take the major share in protecting the British empire against a Japanese attack, to the air force. Plans were laid for an increase in aircraft production, and stepped up year by year in response to Hitler's provocations.

At its conference in 1933 the Labour Party had resolved that the Labour Movement should 'frame a comprehensive restatement of Labour's attitude to this country's international relations, based on Labour's foreign policy'.<sup>79</sup> As a consequence the National Executive approached the General Council for a meeting to discuss how to comply with the resolution, and on 23 January 1934 the General Council agreed to meet, but displayed considerable caution about it. The discussion was to be 'without prejudice to the right of the General Council . . . to deal with their Unions direct', and it was to be 'understood that discussion would take place without prejudice to a decision on a general strike'—on which Congress's Standing Orders provided that the Council should call a Special Congress if there was a threat of war. On 28 February the two bodies met, along with the executive committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party (the 'three executives'). Besides the resolutions of the previous year's Congress and Labour Party conference, they had before them a document from Arthur Henderson which pointed out that the only 'legal loophole for war in the Covenant' of the League of Nations had been closed for Britain by the Labour government's signature of 'the Optional Clause and the General Act of Arbitration'. He added that a disarmament convention could further 'strengthen the collective peace system'. Citrine and Henderson made statements, and the chairmen and secretaries of the three bodies were asked to draft a document.

At a further joint meeting chaired by Attlee on 25 April it became clear that there was still apprehension about the extent to which each of the three parties would be committed to the document when it was finalized. The minutes record that 'the view was generally expressed that while in their separate spheres the three bodies represented on the

<sup>78</sup> Paul Robert Shay Jr, *British Rearmament in the Thirties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 29.

<sup>79</sup> *Report* (1933), 224.

[National Joint] Council were charged with their own distinctive duties and each should shoulder its own responsibilities, efforts should continuously be made to secure the maximum of concerted action'. On 28 June the three executives met to consider the draft, entitled 'War and Peace', which was presented as 'an amalgamation of the views of the T.U.C. and the Labour Party'. Some amendments were considered and the three secretaries were entrusted with drafting the final document. Much of 'War and Peace' reproduced existing policies. It was 'based on the collective peace system' through the League of Nations, and the ultimate objective was a 'World Co-operative Commonwealth'. The Labour Movement wanted disarmament along with an international police force. All international disputes should be submitted 'to some form of pacific procedure'. There were, however, some significant omissions and additions. The resolution of the Labour Party conference in 1933 which had led to 'War and Peace' had proposed a 'pledge to take no part in war', but the final document included no such pledge. Instead it insisted that 'It is necessary to distinguish between a war of an aggressive character and a war in defence of the collective peace system'; and 'having in mind the recent events on the Continent, it was felt there might be occasions when the Movement would assist any defensive action taken to preserve the nation, and its democratic institutions'. It also rejected the idea that war could be stopped by a concerted general strike in the countries concerned. There were no trade union movements left in Germany, Italy, and Austria to play their part in such a strike, and in Japan the trade unions were too weak to do so.

It seems that by this time a fundamental revision of the foreign policy of the Labour Movement was in progress, and that the General Council, led by Bevin and Citrine, was mainly responsible for it. In giving its account to Congress of the drafting of the joint document, the Council reported that the authors

drew attention in their statement to the need for deciding whether the Trade Union and Labour Movement should offer opposition to every war. It goes without saying that the Movement would strenuously resist any attempt on the part of the Government to involve the country in a patently aggressive action against another nation. On the other hand, having in mind the recent events on the Continent, it was felt there might be occasions when the Movement would assist any defensive action taken to preserve the nation, and its democratic institutions. In any case the Movement would have to be consulted, as provided for in Congress Standing Orders.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1934), 156-62. The relevant standing order was no. 8(h). The quotation goes on to point out that it had proved possible 'to consult the Movement' in 1920 when a general strike was threatened should the British government wage war on Russia (see Clegg, *History*, ii. 292).

Nevertheless the parliamentary party continued to vote against the service estimates. Attlee told the House that they could support only those armaments that were 'part of a system of pooled security to be used on behalf of the League', and there was no such system, 'because when the test came the League failed'.<sup>81</sup> The question of the parliamentary party's vote on defence estimates arose again in May 1935. A meeting of the three executives was arranged for 21 May which the General Council decided was so important that they should all attend along with Citrine, who had been booked to go to Oslo to chair a meeting of the International Federation of Trade Unions. On the day the Council met at 9.30 a.m. to hear Citrine go over the points he intended to put to their party colleagues. These included a demand that Britain 'negotiate with Germany to test Hitler's sincerity thoroughly', and 'take the initiative in negotiations for general disarmament', along with the suggestion that the parliamentary party ask for a postponement of the vote in the House in order to avoid giving justification to rearmament by Germany. The meeting ended by emphasizing that 'the responsibility of deciding on the action to be taken should rest with the Party, after they had the views of the General Council before them'. When they met their colleagues at 11 a.m., the latter listened to Citrine's points and promised to consider them before deciding on their vote. In the event their decision was to continue to vote against rearmament.

In the summer Mussolini's threats to Abyssinia brought the three executives together again on 3 and 4 September 1935 at Margate where Congress was due to open on the 7th. They co-ordinated a joint statement with the French Socialist Party and trade union confederation, demanding that the French and British governments 'shall formally and without reserve uphold all the duties and obligations implicit and explicit in the Covenant of the League of Nations with a view to safeguarding the peace of the world'. They went on to agree a 'declaration' to be submitted to Congress. Its essential sentence read: 'The Congress pledges its firm support of any action consistent with the principles and statutes of the League to restrain the Italian Government and to uphold the authority of the League in enforcing peace.' There were pacifist dissenters. Will Arthur of the South Wales Miners told Congress that 'here is one who will not shed blood'.<sup>82</sup> Maurice Hann of the Shop Assistants added: 'you are asked to vote in favour of war. If I had any doubt at all as to the lack of wisdom contained in this resolution every atom of doubt would go when I witness a united front of the "National" Government, the General Council of the Trades Union

<sup>81</sup> HC Debs. (14 Mar. 1934), col. 2366.

<sup>82</sup> Trade Union Congress, *Report* (1935), 359.



Congress, the Christian Church and the Labour Party.<sup>83</sup> Tom Scollan of the Distributive and Allied Workers asked if he was to tell his boy 'that he has got to go? I would see you in hell first.'<sup>84</sup> But the vote was 2,962,000 to 177,000 for the declaration.

It was also put to the Labour Party Conference on 1 October 1935, where the opponents included Stafford Cripps, who was no pacifist but had been convinced that 'the League of Nations . . . has become nothing but the tool of the satiated imperialist powers'.<sup>85</sup> The debate continued all day and through the following morning, but the number of dissenting speakers was not reflected in the size of the adverse vote. The declaration was carried by 2,168,000 to 102,000. On 3 October Mussolini's troops invaded Abyssinia and at the last session of the conference on 4 October the chairman, Jennie Adamson, read a statement of the National Council of Labour asking for the recall of Parliament without delay 'in order that the Government should inform the House of Commons what steps they have taken, and propose to take through the League in order to bring hostilities to an end'.<sup>86</sup> At first all went well. The Council of the League of Nations decided that Italy had broken the Covenant and on 9 October the Assembly agreed. A committee was set up to co-ordinate sanctions against Italy, but it did not include the essential embargo on oil supplies. Britain and France began to canvass proposals for peace negotiations between Italy and Abyssinia, and on 9 December the Hoare-Laval plan was published. If accepted, it would have given Mussolini most of what he wanted; but he, realizing that the league's opposition to him was at an end, held out for total victory, which he gained in May when the Abyssinian emperor, Haile Selassie, and his family fled to exile in Britain.

Meanwhile, on 7 March 1936, Hitler's troops had reoccupied the Rhineland. They met no resistance. Four days earlier, on 3 March, the national joint council had met to consider the movement's response to the latest White Paper on Defence which proposed very substantial increases in rearmament. William Gillies, secretary of the party's International Department, had submitted a memorandum to the National Executive on 1 March in which he recalled that the party's election manifesto of 1935 had committed them 'to the maintenance of "such defence forces as are consistent with our membership of the League"'. 'This declaration', he wrote,

was a rejection of unilateral disarmament and even of voting against estimates for the services *as a matter of principle*. On the other hand it was also a rejection of competitive national armaments based upon a policy of isolation. . . . our

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1935), 157.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 357.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 242.

armed forces must be fixed in view of the possibility of war with States which do not belong to the League and/or those which, although in the League, have shown themselves to be hostile to the League and a system of pooled security or even those which pursue a policy of 'neutrality'. . . .

Whatever may be one's calculation of the political probabilities, it would be criminal for any Government to neglect the dangers inherent in the present situation.<sup>87</sup>

The General Council met on 4 March to hear Citrine summarize its 'general view'. He began by saying that Congress had already settled its policy, so the Council was concerned only with its application.

The Council had not opposed rearmament under every possible circumstance, because they were committed to the collective peace system, and insofar as it was necessary, they could not resist providing their quota of arms. . . .

The Council's support of the Government would only be insofar as the Government supported the League.

The real issue appeared to be: 'Was this rearmament necessary for the League?' On this the Parliamentary Labour Party should urge the calling of an international conference.

There followed three points which displayed the extent to which the Council distrusted the parliamentary party. The first two were: 'The party should be asked in debate to avoid making concessions to Hitler. They should avoid "angling" for a Government invitation to the TUC for consultation.' The third point was that the party 'should not come to a decision, but listen to the government, demand pledges from them as to the use to which the arms would be put, and call a meeting of the National Council of Labour before the debate'—'if the Labour Party now said that they were going to vote against the Government, they would throw away their bargaining power'.

The three executives met later the same day. Citrine proposed seeking a pledge from the government that 'the armed forces would only be used through the League under the system of collective security'. Morrison, however, said that the National Executive 'could not acquiesce in the White Paper' and should move 'a reasoned Amendment in terms of censure'. A pledge from the government, even if it gave one, could not be accepted as genuine. Thereafter the two records of the meeting diverge markedly. The Labour Party executive's version records that it emerged that the only difference was 'whether an effort ought to be made to extract the suggested pledges'. The General Council's version says that it was told that a decision was required that day in view of the party's timetable, and that the Council had not previously been informed of this. Attlee 'was closing the meeting stating

<sup>87</sup> National Executive Committee, *Minutes* (1 Mar. 1936).

that there was unanimity of opinion', when Citrine protested. The Council's proposals had not been considered. It had not 'sacrificed their right to follow such policy as they may determine if such methods of consultation, open to them, had failed'. After Lawther, Bromley, and Dukes had supported Citrine, Attlee tried to calm them down by telling them that the parliamentary party was 'ready for consultation at all times'. Evidently the Council was no longer of a mind to trust the parliamentary party to take its own decisions. The latter, of course, voted against the White Paper. There were, however, influential members of the Labour Party who took a different view. In May 1936 its Advisory Committee on International Questions submitted a paper on the armaments race which it called 'the most rapid and dangerous ever known', but it also said that: 'The Labour Party should, however, make clear that it does consider it essential to enlist and retain an ample *preponderance of power* on the side of those States which are judged most likely to prove loyal in respecting and preserving the League's basic laws of peace and justice.'<sup>88</sup> When it came to the votes on the estimates for the individual services, Hugh Dalton argued against the decision to vote against them all. He had only three supporters in the executive of the parliamentary party,<sup>89</sup> but when the issue was put to the whole parliamentary party, the adverse vote was no more than 57 to 39.<sup>90</sup>

Bevin explained to Congress in September 1936 that the General Council had decided not to submit a resolution on international policy that year.

The whole position that has arisen as between the democratic and peace-loving states and the Fascist menace of war demands that there should be the most careful re-examination and a statement issued to the Movement after the closest consultation with the Party in the light of these developments. . . . If in certain respects it means uprooting some of our cherished ideals and facing the issue fairly in the light of the development of Fascism, we must do it for the Movement and for the sake of posterity.<sup>91</sup>

By contrast, the National Executive Committee submitted a resolution to the Labour Party Conference in October. It reaffirmed

the policy of the Labour Party to maintain such defence forces as are consistent with our country's responsibility as a Member of the League of Nations. . . . [but] Realising the relationship between foreign policy and armaments and having regard to the deplorable record of the Government, the Labour Party declines to accept responsibility for a purely competitive armament policy. . . .

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. (May 1936).

<sup>89</sup> In all there were sixteen members of the executive.

<sup>90</sup> Dalton, 90. When a vote was taken in the House, Dalton abstained, as, he says, 'did a number of others' (ibid.).

<sup>91</sup> Trade Union Congress, *Report* (1936), 358.

The Conference accordingly pledges the Labour Party to increasing efforts . . . to secure the return of a Labour Government to power.<sup>92</sup>

Dalton moved the resolution without being able to explain to what policy on armaments the delegates were being asked to commit themselves; and certainly no one else was able to do so. At the end of a long debate Herbert Morrison asked whether it was 'possible for the real question . . . namely, the issue whether the Parliamentary Party should be asked to vote for the Government's rearmament programme—can be brought before the Conference'.<sup>93</sup> There was no answer, and the resolution was carried by 1,738,000 votes to 657,000 without anyone knowing what they were voting for, or against.

By this time the attention of the Labour Movement, along with that of the other European labour movements, had been seized by the Spanish Civil War which began in June 1936. Almost at once the Italian and German governments began to supply the rebel generals with arms and even reinforcements. Along with the French Popular Front government headed by the Socialist leader Blum, Britain promoted a non-intervention pact in which Germany, Italy, Russia, and a number of other countries agreed to join, undertaking to supply neither side with arms or any other military assistance. This meant that even the countries which that have wished for a victory of the constitutional Spanish government had to deny it the arms that under international law it was its legal right to buy. In an unusually impassioned speech Citrine told Congress:

The French government was convinced . . . that if they went on supplying Spain in this emergency with the munitions the Spanish Government needed there would be in all probability an outbreak of war in Europe. . . . The dilemma in which we were placed was this. How could we judge whether the risk of war was real or not? . . . we decided we had no alternative but to publish a manifesto declaring in unmistakable terms the right of the Spanish Government to be supplied with the munitions it needed.<sup>94</sup>

On 18 August he had gone, with Greenwood and Middleton on behalf of the Labour Party, to see Eden, the Foreign Secretary, to argue for the Spanish government's right to buy arms, but Eden supported the non-intervention scheme which Blum had proposed. On 28 August the three executives had met to express their regret over the non-intervention agreement, to emphasize the need for vigilance over its application, and to call on all sections of the Labour Movement to contribute to the International Solidarity Fund for Spain. To explain this change of heart, Citrine went on to say:

<sup>92</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1936), 182.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 206.

<sup>94</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1936), 361.



I beg of you when you are considering this matter to do what I have been trying to do, and what members of our Council have been trying to do, namely, to stifle their natural impulses and try to use their brains in the situation.

There is only one answer [to the question of how, without the non-intervention pact, to stop Germany and Italy supplying arms to the rebels], and that is to place a naval blockade round the coasts of Spain. . . . I had to ask myself this question. If there is no other means except naval action or military action to restrain a Hitler or a Mussolini, dare I tie the British Labour Movement, dare I tie British public opinion to take that sort of action. Frankly, friends, I could not say 'Yes' to that. I knew that in our movement there were those who for years have been burking this issue, who every time there had been under discussion the question of force to be exercised against aggressors, have evaded facing it. I thought to myself even in the British Labour Movement we shall require some heart-searching before we can give a definite, clear reply as to what we should do on that question.<sup>95</sup>

By the time the Labour Party Conference met a month later, evidence was already accumulating of breaches of the pact by Germany and Italy. Two Spanish delegates, Señor de Asua and Señora de Palencia (a Scotswoman by birth) addressed the conference, raising its temper with their accounts of the aid arriving for the rebels from the Fascist powers. In order to keep the situation under control, the National Executive Committee announced that 'in view of the serious situation disclosed regarding the working of the Non-intervention Agreement . . . the position should be reviewed by the National Council of Labour', as the National Joint Council was now called. This body agreed a statement which Attlee presented at the end of conference. It proposed that 'the investigation of the alleged breaches of the Spanish Non-intervention Agreement should be pressed forward with the utmost speed', and its findings published. If the agreement was found to be either 'ineffective' or 'definitely violated', the French and British governments were 'to take steps forthwith to restore to the Spanish Government their right to purchase . . . arms'.<sup>96</sup> Cripps proposed to insert a declaration by conference of 'its conviction that the Fascist powers have broken their pledge of non-intervention'. Attlee agreed, and, with that addition, the statement was unanimously approved.<sup>97</sup> The leaders of the Labour Movement did not wait for an official investigation of the working of non-intervention. On 19 October, only ten days after the end of the conference, the press published a letter from Attlee to Baldwin, asking for the recall of Parliament at once 'to discuss the breakdown of the Spanish non-intervention policy'.<sup>98</sup> On 21 October the National

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 363. Bevin then moved a resolution expressing 'profound sympathy with the Spanish Government' and stating that 'the utmost vigilance is necessary to prevent these solemn engagements [to non-intervention] being utilised to injure the Spanish Government' (ibid. 366).

<sup>96</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1936), 258.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 262.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. (1937) 6.

Council of Labour made an urgent request for a meeting of the Labour and Socialists International and the International Federation of Trade Unions (the 'Two Internationals'); and on 26 October these bodies met together in Paris. They unanimously declared that it was 'the common duty of the working class of all countries to secure by their influence on public opinion and upon their respective Governments the conclusion of an international agreement—for which the French and British governments should take the initiative—restoring complete commercial liberty to republican Spain'.<sup>99</sup> The three executives met on 28 October to adopt and publish a statement along the lines recommended in Paris.

From this point the policies of the European democracies and their labour movements towards the Spanish conflict stagnated until it came to an end with the capture of Madrid by the rebels early in 1939. The Two Internationals wanted an end to non-intervention so that arms could be supplied to the republican government; but the agreement could be terminated only by the governments that had accepted it, and especially its authors, the British and French governments. However, there was never the slightest indication that the British government would be prepared to terminate the non-intervention agreement, or any sign that the French government would be willing to take the initiative. On 25 November Citrine told the General Council that a deputation from the French Socialist Party and trade union confederation had seen him the day before to ask that the Council take steps to influence the British government to end the agreement. He said that 'it would be misleading them to assume there was any real likelihood of a change being made by the British Government', adding that, as the French government had recently reaffirmed its support for non-intervention, 'it was necessary for the delegation to make representations to their own Government'.

The two governments were, of course, aware that the agreement was being flagrantly violated by Germany and Italy. In March 1937 the international non-intervention committee instituted a system of 'control' to ensure that the agreement was honoured, but it was turned into a farce by entrusting the surveillance of Spain's Mediterranean coast to the Italian and German fleets. The Soviet government was also a party to the agreement, but made it clear that it was not going to regard itself as bound by it so long as the Fascist powers continued to flout it. It sent arms to Spain, but not on a scale equal to that of Germany and Italy. The only occasion on which the democratic governments showed determination in dealing with Italy and Germany was at the Nyon conference in September 1937 which agreed to put an end to acts of

<sup>99</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1936), 7.

piracy against vessels plying to and from republican Spain by, of course, Italian and German warships. This agreement was strictly enforced by the French and British fleets.

However, besides presenting the British Labour Movement, and other labour movements with the dilemma of how to provide effective assistance to the Spanish republicans while Germany and Italy were supplying the rebels with arms and other assistance, and while the democratic European powers were committed to non-intervention, the Spanish Civil War also gave the labour movement in Britain and elsewhere a crusade: to encourage and support the republicans in every way now left open to them. There were meetings, marches, and rallies to publicize their cause. Money was collected. Food and clothing were sent, along with medical supplies. Ambulance units were recruited, supplied, and dispatched. A base hospital was established in Spain. Refugee children, mostly from the Basque country, were found homes. Some 2,000 Britons, the 'great majority' of them 'workers, particularly unemployed miners',<sup>100</sup> volunteered to go to Spain to fight alongside the republican army in the International Brigade, which also recruited contingents from many other countries. Moreover, it was by no means only workers who were inspired by the republican cause: 'Intellectuals demonstrated in favour of the republic. They demanded "arms for Spain". Some of them visited Spain. Some of the younger ones fought for the republic. Some, of high intellectual lineage and achievement, were killed. "Bloomsbury" rallied to Spain where it had once held aloof from political questions.'<sup>101</sup> Left-wing schoolboys (and, no doubt, schoolgirls) seized the morning papers to search for republican advances and victories, and to bemoan their retreats and reverses. In the long run, however, the main effect of the Spanish Civil War on the British Labour Movement was to confirm and advance the change that had been at work in its foreign policy. Pacifist sentiment had been

strong in the Labour Party. It was not for the most part George Lansbury's pacifism, involving an absolute repudiation of an appeal to force. It was rather a strong, instinctive revulsion against contemplating the idea of war. This sentiment was strongest among the older members of the Party, who remembered the disillusionments of the first World War . . . and were disposed to argue that nothing but evil ever came out of war.<sup>102</sup>

The Spanish Civil war effectively killed off most of what remained of this pacifist sentiment in the unions and the Labour Party, although there remained a dwindling band of absolute pacifists.

Bevin's proposal at the 1936 Trades Union Congress that there should be a careful re-examination of the movement's international

<sup>100</sup> Taylor, 396.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 395-6.

<sup>102</sup> Cole, 320.

policy in close consultation with the Labour Party was taken up by the National Council of Labour in 1937. It was decided that the National Executive Committee of the party should draft a document. This they did; the draft was considered by the General Council; and then issued by the National Council of Labour. Entitled 'International Policy and Defence', it summarized events over recent years, and concluded with six brief paragraphs which dealt with future policy. The first of these recorded the conviction of the National Council of Labour that war could be prevented and the arms race stopped by a British government that based 'its policy on the declarations of the British Labour Movement'. The second proposed that such a government should appeal to the Fascist governments to accept a disarmament treaty. The third and fourth insisted that such a government must be 'strongly equipped to defend this country' and therefore, until it could change the international situation, 'would be unable to reverse the present programme of Rearmament'. The two remaining paragraphs added little more.<sup>103</sup>

The document was presented first to Congress in September by Citrine. In view of its origin there could be little doubt that Congress would give its approval. Nevertheless Bill Zak of the Furniture Trades, a Communist, moved the reference back with the support of Arthur Horner (another Communist); and Aneurin Bevan, attending as a Miners' delegate, asked Citrine whether it committed Congress to support the government's rearmament programme.<sup>104</sup> Citrine replied with another question: 'With regard to the Government's programme, how are we committed? We are committed neither to the extent of rearmament, to the character of rearmament, nor the range of rearmament. . . . The only thing we are committed to is . . . adequate defence.'<sup>105</sup> Clearly even Citrine did not want the position of the Labour Movement to be wholly without ambiguity. The reference back was defeated by 3,544,000 votes to 224,000.

Since Dalton was chairman of the 1937 Labour Party Conference, Clynes presented 'International Policy and Defence' there, and, appropriately enough, George Lansbury moved the reference back. Bevin spoke here also, and, characteristically, his words were less diplomatic than those of Citrine at Congress. He said: 'I am bound to confess that the more determined attitude on the armaments question taken by Great Britain has revived hopes that Britain may yet stand beside the liberty-loving nations of the world.'<sup>106</sup> Bevan, too, was there. He quoted Citrine's reply to his question at Congress, contrasted it with

<sup>103</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1937), 470-7.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* 425.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 415.

<sup>106</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1937), 207.



what Bevin had just said, and went on to remark that 'Mr Clynes used a number of arguments in support of the Report as though it supported immediate rearmament.' His conclusion was:

The fact of the matter is that a re-statement of the Party's foreign policy is being made the guise under which the Movement is being committed to a real support of the rearmament programme of the Government . . .

I hope that after this vote is carried, my Parliamentary colleagues will not quote it as giving them a right to take us into the Lobby for the Government rearmament programme.<sup>107</sup>

However, the policy of the parliamentary party in relation to the government's rearmament programme had already been revised. In February 1937 the government sought approval for a loan of £400 million to meet part of the cost of rearmament. The party voted against it. In March the estimates for the three services were presented, and the party voted against them all. In July came the vote on the total defence estimates. At a meeting of the parliamentary party's executive on 19 July, Dalton proposed that it change its policy on defence votes to abstention instead of opposition. He was supported by Noel-Baker and Pethick-Lawrence. Clynes, who would also have supported him, was absent. Some others wavered, but in the end he was defeated by a wide margin. The committee's recommendation to continue voting against the estimates then came before the parliamentary party, which met on 21 July and again the next day. 'I persuaded the Party', wrote Dalton in his autobiography, 'by 45 to 39, to upset the majority recommendation of the Executive and to abstain from voting on the Defence Estimates. . . . If there had been a larger attendance at the Party meeting, the majority would have been, not reversed but increased. If I had polled all my promises, the majority would have been nearly 30.'<sup>108</sup> Dalton went on to say that all the Co-operative Members of Parliament, except one, voted with him. So did all the Railwaymen and Railway Clerks present. The Miners, however, were split. Those from Durham and Lancashire supported him whereas those from Yorkshire and South Wales voted against him. It is almost certain that Bevin and Dukes would have made sure that the Members of Parliament sponsored by the two general unions cast their votes for Dalton; and extremely likely that a number of other Members sponsored by trade unions would have been influenced by the attitude the General Council was known to have taken for the past three years on voting against the government's armaments programme. On that tally, it seems that a majority of Dalton's supporters must have been Members sponsored by trade unions and the Co-operative Party; and it would therefore seem probable that a majority of his opponents

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 208.

<sup>108</sup> Dalton, 133-4.

were Members sponsored by constituency parties. On 26-7 July came the votes in the House of Commons. Dalton records that only six Labour Members voted against the estimates. In their report to the Labour Party Conference that year the officers of the parliamentary party seemed anxious to minimize the significance of this reversal. They wrote: 'the Party considered the action to be taken, and bearing in mind that its position had already been made abundantly clear, decided that in view of the international situation, it would abstain from any further divisions against the Estimates for the Fighting Services, but vote as usual against all other Estimates involving policy'.<sup>109</sup> The true significance of the new policy was demonstrated in the House of Commons on 2 September 1939 when Greenwood, acting as leader in Attlee's absence, was able to 'speak for England'.<sup>110</sup>

In August 1937 Japan had renewed her invasion of China, and in the autumn the National Council of Labour tried to organize a boycott of Japanese goods. On 7 January 1938 the three executives discussed a scheme for a government ban on loans to Japan with an embargo on both imports to, and exports from, Japan, which was approved by a meeting of the Two Internationals a fortnight later. Citrine went to see Chamberlain, who had succeeded Baldwin as Prime Minister in May 1937, about the scheme, without success. In February Chamberlain decided to open talks with Italy, and Eden resigned as Foreign Secretary. On 12 March 1938 Hitler's troops invaded Austria, manifestly threatening Czechoslovakia, where the Sudeten Germans were already causing trouble. The General Council asked for a meeting of the Two Internationals, which took place in Paris on 15-16 March and resolved that affiliated organizations 'should be ready to support the French and British Governments in whatever measures, moral, political, financial, economic or military, which may be necessary to bring the Italian and German aggression to an end'. It wanted them 'to intensify their campaign for solidarity on behalf of Spain', and 'to have the economic and political independence of Czechoslovakia effectively guaranteed by precise and positive undertakings, in the first place, by France and Great Britain'.<sup>111</sup>

On 23 March 1938 Citrine told the General Council that the Prime Minister wanted to meet it at 5 p.m. that day to discuss the acceleration of the rearmament programme.<sup>112</sup> After discussing whether it would be

<sup>109</sup> *Report* (1939), 86.

<sup>110</sup> See p. 145, note 139.

<sup>111</sup> Joint Meeting of the General Council, the National Executive Committee, and the Parliamentary Labour Party's Executive Committee, *Minutes* (25 Mar. 1938).

<sup>112</sup> There have been suggestions of earlier approaches from the one side or the other for talks on rearmament between the government and the General Council. Shay asserts that in February 1936 the Council 'let it be known that they would be pleased to consult with the Government about the problems of expediting the rearmament process' (p. 128). There is no reference to this in the

better to wait until after the statement that Chamberlain was to make the next day, it agreed by 16 votes to 7 to meet him at 5 p.m., but resolved to make 'no commitment on policy' unless it first withdrew to discuss it. Chamberlain of course did not believe that the Council as such could directly affect the production of armaments. His purpose was revealed by the meeting arranged for the following day between Inskip, the Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, and representatives of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions. Chamberlain wanted the blessing of the Council for subsequent talks, industry by industry, with individual unions. The meeting between Chamberlain and the Council is not recorded in the General Council's minutes, but the Council's response was made clear in a letter Citrine wrote to Chamberlain even before the Council arranged to give him its views in person. He wrote that the Council 'appreciated the need for adequately strengthening the defensive equipment of the country'. This, it believed, could best be assisted by the unions through discussions with employers and government representatives industry by industry, but the Council 'would be ready to collaborate . . . insofar as found to be necessary'.<sup>113</sup> Citrine asked for the meeting between Inskip and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions to be delayed for an hour to allow him to explain to the leaders of the confederation why the Council had met Chamberlain. What he said to them can probably be gauged that circular which the Council subsequently issued to all affiliated unions, telling them that it was in favour of discussions with employers over the acceleration of rearmament; that what the unions settled with their employers was a matter for them; but that the Council would like to be kept in touch.<sup>114</sup>

On 25 March 1939 the three executives were due to meet. Before this meeting the Council reconvened and unanimously recorded 'its conviction that in dealing with any Government on behalf of the Trade Union Movement, its conduct must be determined by industrial and not by political considerations'. This decision precluded any discussion with Labour Party representatives of the Council's meeting with Chamberlain. The meeting therefore confined its attention to

Council's minutes. However, the Council's report to Congress for that year (Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1936), 180) recorded: 'At a meeting of the National Council of Labour on February 25, careful consideration was given to the international situation and it was reported that repeated statements had appeared in the Press to the effect that the General Council of the Trades Union Congress had been approached by the Government in regard to the projected armaments programme. On behalf of the General Council it was categorically stated that no such approach had been made.' It was in April 1936 that the General Council decided to ask the parliamentary party 'to avoid "angling" for a Government invitation to the TUC for consultation'.

<sup>113</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (25 May 1938).

<sup>114</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1938), 227.

Chamberlain's statement on the 24th and a manifesto drafted by the National Executive, which it approved. The manifesto said that Chamberlain had disclosed 'no constructive policy for the appeasement of Europe or the prevention of war. . . . He has refused to make any immediate use of the machinery of the League of Nations and Collective Security to put a check to the lawless aggression of the Fascist dictators.' What the Labour Movement wanted was '*a common stand against aggression*' and 'general negotiations among all powers for the political and economic appeasement'. Evidently the Council's willingness to cooperate with Chamberlain over rearmament was not to be interpreted to indicate acceptance of his foreign policy.

On 22 June the Council met with the three national employers' organizations—the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations, the Federation of British Industry, and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce—under the chairmanship of Sir Samuel Hoare to discuss air-raid precautions in industry. At the meeting of the Council on 25 May, Andrew Conley of the Tailors and Garment Workers had questioned whether it was entitled to do this without the authorisation of Congress. He was assured 'that the Council were free to take action on anything of interest to their affiliated membership and to report their action to the next Congress'.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless it later decided to tell Congress that 'nothing had been done to commit the General Council or the Movement in relation to air raid precautions'.<sup>116</sup> The Council was pursuing several objectives which it did not find easy to reconcile. It wanted to assist rearmament, but also wished to avoid too close an association with a government to whose foreign policies it and many of its members were bitterly opposed; and it wanted to maintain and use its freedom of action without giving offence to any important section of its membership. Citrine made a powerful defence of what the Council had done at Congress in September:

The General Council must have regard to the policy that Congress has laid down for some years. That policy is that we must stand up to the aggressors, that if the challenge is made this country must meet it. Last year we said with no uncertain voice that we approved of the country equipping itself with defensive means to meet that challenge. . . . When we are brought face to face with the practical carrying out of that policy, no General Council can escape their responsibilities.<sup>117</sup>

There was not much opposition from the floor. The Engineers' president, Jack Little, complained that the Council's action had led to a demand from the engineering employers for dilution which was

<sup>115</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (25 May 1938).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* (1 Sept. 1938).

<sup>117</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1938), 301.



currently unnecessary. They 'have too many men now'. He asked the Council 'please to be good enough to leave this matter with the Unions. . . . We would like you to use your power as a last resort, but if you fritter it away by anticipating discussion, then we feel we are going to be in a sad mess should we need the power and support of the whole Trade Union Movement'.<sup>118</sup> There was, however, little substance in this complaint. The Council had already made clear that it had no intention of interfering in negotiations with employers over rearmament within each industry, and had already protested at the engineering employers' action in opening their discussions with proposals for dilution and suspension of trade union practices.<sup>119</sup>

The main topic at Congress was Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain was already pressing the Czechs to cede the predominantly German-speaking areas of their country to Hitler, and had sent Walter Runciman to Prague in July to keep up the pressure on them. On 7 September the three executives met to agree a declaration drafted by the National Executive which was to be presented to Congress as the policy of the Labour Movement. It was a forthright statement, ending with: 'Whatever the risks involved, Great Britain must take its stand against aggression. There is no longer room for doubt or hesitation.'<sup>120</sup> A delegation of Czech trade-unionists had come to Congress. It told the Council that 'the British ambassador in Prague [Runciman] had brought the greatest possible pressure on the Czechoslovak Government to accept Hitler's last proposal'; and expressed its delight with the statement of the three executives as 'a deterrent to any further pressure' and 'a warning to Hitler'.<sup>121</sup> To general amazement Harold Clay, a senior officer of the Transport and General Workers, moved its reference back on the grounds that 'it was a new statement of policy . . . which should have been submitted to Congress first', and not handed out to the press the night before. Arthur Deakin, the union's assistant general secretary, explained that Clay was not speaking for the union and, on a show of hands, the reference back was 'overwhelmingly defeated'.<sup>122</sup>

On 21 September the three executives met to discuss the outcome of Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Since Chamberlain was not available, Attlee and Greenwood went to see the Foreign Secretary, Halifax. On their return, Attlee reported that 'the cabinet decision was tantamount to a complete and abject surrender imposed

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 302.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 230. When Berridge, a member of the Engineers' executive and a Communist, moved the reference back of the Council's report, it was lost by 'an overwhelming majority' on a show of hands (*ibid.* 303-13).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 474-5.

<sup>121</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (8 Sept. 1938).

<sup>122</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1938), 381-6.

upon the Czechoslovakian Government against which . . . he and Mr Greenwood had vigorously protested'.<sup>123</sup> Subsequently a deputation drawn from each of the three bodies went to protest to Halifax. On its return a statement was drafted and adopted without dissent. It had 'read with profound humiliation the statement of the Czechoslovakian Government issued in Prague to-day that it had been "forced under irresistible pressure by both the British and French Governments to accept . . . the proposals elaborated in London"'.<sup>124</sup> It saw what had been done as a 'sacrifice of the vital British interests . . . in the sanctity of international law . . . With every surrender to violence peace recedes.' There was little more to be said when Chamberlain returned from Munich after his final betrayal of the Czechs at the end of the month. In spite of his claim that he had brought 'peace in our time', Munich was followed by a further acceleration of preparations for war. The main beneficiary was the army. The French were pressing the British to do something to replace the thirty-six Czech divisions that Chamberlain had sacrificed, and it was decided that Britain should after all have an expeditionary force ready to send to the Continent, consisting of six divisions, with four divisions of the Territorial Army ready to follow them six months later.<sup>125</sup>

Preparations for air-raid precautions were also pushed ahead, and volunteers were sought for this and other forms of national service. At that stage 'national service' did not mean conscription, which the government was pledged not to introduce. The General Council was approached by the Ministry of War before the end of October about plans to communicate with firms about the defence of their premises, and it decided to discuss the matter with the National Council of Employers' Organizations.<sup>126</sup> Early in December the Ministry of Labour asked it to co-operate on national service, and with the preparation of a 'secret' schedule of reserved occupations.<sup>127</sup> After seeing the minister and Sir John Anderson, it decided to co-operate on the schedule of reserved occupations, but still had worries over the government assurance that national service was to be voluntary.<sup>128</sup> Eventually, after some of its concerns about pay, pensions, compensation for injury and death, and contractual obligations had been met, it agreed to co-operate, nominating four members and Tewson to serve on the Central National Service Committee, and asking the trades councils to make nominations to the local committees.<sup>129</sup> On 22 March 1939 it considered a request for trade union speakers to join a panel for a campaign to popularize

<sup>123</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (21 Sept. 1938).

<sup>124</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1939), 16.

<sup>126</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (26 Oct. 1938).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* (19 Dec. 1938).

<sup>125</sup> Shay, 237.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* (7 Dec. 1938).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* (25 Jan., 25 Feb. 1939).

national service. It agreed to co-operate, but decided to raise the matter at a meeting of the three executives later the same day, in order 'to get a uniform decision'.

Before this joint meeting convened, news came through of Hitler's occupation of what was left of Czechoslovakia. The meeting agreed to send a deputation to see the Prime Minister. Citrine was abroad along with his fellow-members of the Royal Commission on the West Indies, and Bevin, who had been taking the lead in his absence, was also unable to be there, so the General Council members of the deputation were Hallsworth and Dukes. The three executives reconvened the next day (23 March) to hear its report. The deputation had told Chamberlain of 'the general anxiety of the Labour Movement regarding the delay and indecision that seemed to mark the Government's actions in seeking the formation of a "Peace Bloc" among nations with a view to effecting Collective Security'.<sup>130</sup> Why, it had asked, had the Soviet proposal for a conference not been adopted?<sup>131</sup> Chamberlain said that such a conference had not been ruled out, but he wanted assurances from the governments concerned beforehand so that the conference would be able to take decisions; and went on to talk about other difficulties over organizing concerted action. Nevertheless, Dalton reported, 'the Prime Minister's view regarding Herr Hitler had been subjected to disillusionment, and . . . a new tone and direction of policy was evident'.<sup>132</sup> The meeting then took up the question of national service. The Labour Party reported its view that Members of Parliament would be of more use in their own constituencies than on a national panel of speakers, and it was generally agreed that Attlee should seek an opportunity to broadcast the party's attitude to national service on the radio. The General Council then met separately to hear Bevin, Hallsworth, and Tewson report on a meeting with Sir Thomas Phillips, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, on the handling of shortages of skilled workers, of wages, and of trade disputes in wartime. On wages, it had told him that the first step must be for the government to control prices and profits. If that was done, the Council considered that it would be possible to set up machinery within industry to deal with the regulation of wages and with disputes. Bevin told the meeting that the 'whole thing' should be 'put on a formal basis'. He proposed that prices should be stabilized by Treasury subsidies.<sup>133</sup>

These topics occupied further meetings of the Council on 31 March and 5 April. At the first, the Minister of Labour read a statement and then withdrew along with his officials. Dukes considered that the

<sup>130</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (23 Mar. 1939).

<sup>131</sup> This proposal has been made on 18 Mar. 1939.

<sup>132</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (23 Mar. 1939).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

Council should act for all the unions, but did not want to find that some of them would choose to act independently. James Kaylor, of the Engineers, said that his union, would not authorize the Council to act for them. Bevin's view was that 'if they had the goodwill of the Movement' it should be possible 'to act within certain limitations centrally, and beyond them act as separate trades'. Not everyone agreed, and the meeting adjourned. Much of the next meeting was spent going over the same ground. Finally Bevin carried a resolution that 'a machine be constructed for dealing with the Government'. Otherwise, he said, the 'brasshats' would take over, and 'they would not get rid of them in their life-time. In trying to fight tyranny they would let themselves slip into it.' The Finance and General Purposes Committee was authorized to draw up a scheme.<sup>134</sup>

Meanwhile Hitler had seized the free port of Memel on 21 March, indicating that his next victim would be Poland. Chamberlain announced a British guarantee of Poland's frontiers on 31 March, and followed it up with guarantees to Greece, Romania, Denmark, Holland, and Switzerland (although the last two countries rejected British protection). These guarantees may have been one of the factors that pushed the government towards conscription. French pressure was another, but, according to Shay, the main reason was 'the Army's lack of personnel to man the nation's anti-aircraft positions continuously'.<sup>135</sup> On 26 April Chamberlain announced that the government proposed to introduce a bill for compulsory military service, initially for men aged 20-1. He had arranged to see the General Council (with Citrine, who was back from the West Indies) at noon, followed by Attlee and Greenwood at 1 p.m. Marchbank proposed, and the Council agreed, to tell the Prime Minister that 'their policy on conscription was defined and . . . the Government had departed from the conditions agreed to when they undertook to co-operate on National Service Committees etc. and they, therefore, felt free to take what action this Council and the Trade Union movement would determine later'. Chamberlain's response was to point out to the Council the 'new commitments undertaken in Europe' and to say that 'nothing would show more clearly the determination of this country to offer firm resistance to any attempt at general domination than its acceptance of compulsory military service'. He did not think the government's pledge against introducing conscription in the life of the current parliament should be binding in these circumstances. He assured the Council that provision would be made for exemption for conscientious objectors. The Council told him that there were plenty of recruits, grumbled about 'chaos and lack of equipment' and 'emphatic

<sup>134</sup> There is no record of the committee having done so.

<sup>135</sup> Shay, 272.



and categorical assurances', and went off to a meeting of the three executives which approved an amendment to the bill, to be moved by Attlee, saying that conscription, 'so far from adding materially to the effective defence of the country, will promote division and discourage the national effort'.<sup>136</sup>

The Council did not, however, propose to take any action to disrupt conscription. The three executives decided on 4 May to continue co-operation with voluntary services, and this decision was confirmed by a special conference of trade union executives called by the Council on 19 May where a resolution proposing withdrawal from all forms of national service was defeated by a vote of more than sixteen to one, and another proposing a conference 'to consider the question of calling a General Strike as a last effort to oppose military and industrial conscription' was defeated by a vote of more than eight to one. On 28 June the Council agreed to submit nominations to the Ministry of Labour for trade-unionists to sit as assessors to the umpire who was to hear appeals against call-up. In March the parliamentary party had resumed its practice of voting against the defence estimates, giving as its grounds the large profits being made by the armaments producers (which the government was unsuccessfully trying to bring under control), and the need for 'a complete and searching independent investigation . . . into the state of our air defences and the administration of the departments concerned'.<sup>137</sup> At this stage, however, no one could reasonably interpret this action, or the objections of both the party and the unions to conscription, as indicating unconcern with the need to provide for the country's defences.

After exchanging several proposals for conferences, pacts, and guarantees, the British, French, and Soviet governments began negotiations in Moscow over a pact of mutual assistance at the end of May. Progress was slow, mainly because the British showed little sense of urgency. Hitler made approaches to the Russians. On 21 August his foreign minister, Ribbentrop, arrived in Moscow, and on 23 August a treaty was concluded between the two countries in which they agreed their spheres of interest in eastern Europe, including Poland. This treaty of course put an end to the talks with Britain and France. On 26 July the General Council had made its final arrangements for Congress in September, after which most of its members no doubt departed for their holidays. They came together again on 25 August to deal with the threatened national strike of railway footplate staff. Citrine had been in touch with W. J. R. Squance, their secretary, to remind him of his

<sup>136</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (26, 27 Apr. 1939).

<sup>137</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1939), 138-9.

union's obligation under Standing Order 11 'to keep the General Council informed' of disputes with employers, 'in particular where such disputes may involve directly or indirectly large bodies of workers', so that the General Council could intervene in case of deadlock. Citrine told the Council that Squance had 'phoned to let him know that telegrams had gone out to all the union's branches saying that negotiations had been resumed'. The dispute was subsequently settled.<sup>138</sup>

The Council then turned its attention to the international crisis. A proposal from Marchbank that it should not co-operate with the new Ministry of Information was rejected by 14 votes to 4; an exchange of messages of solidarity with the French Confédération Générale de Travail was reported; and arrangements for carrying on the work of the Council in the event of war were finalized. Most of it was to be transferred to Nuneaton, but a skeleton staff was to remain at Transport House. It then went on to a meeting of the three executives where Citrine reported that he had received an assurance from the Home Secretary that the Emergency Powers Act, which had been passed through all its stages on the 24th when Parliament had reconvened, 'did not deal with Trade Union rights in industry'. The meeting empowered the National Council of Labour to act for the Labour Movement in wartime; although Citrine made the reservation that he must be able to consult the General Council on issues of principle. The text of a *Statement to the German People* was agreed.

The Council met again on 21 August at Bridlington where Congress was due to start on 2 September. It was told that the National Council of Labour had asked Greenwood to advise the government to proceed with mobilization and the evacuation of schoolchildren and mothers with young children, 'to convince Germany of the firm stand they were making'. On 1 September German troops crossed the Polish frontier and their planes bombed Warsaw. The Council decided to go ahead with a two-day instead of five-day meeting of Congress. That evening the government sent a warning, not an ultimatum, to Hitler to withdraw his troops from Poland so that a peaceful solution could be explored. Chamberlain spoke to the leaders of the Labour Party about the possibility of joining a coalition government. They refused, waiting for the day when they could insist on a government led by a man in whom they could have confidence. In the House the party voted for a bill to extend the obligation to military service to 41 years of age. The following day the executive of the Parliamentary Labour Party met with the National Executive Committee to instruct Greenwood, in Attlee's

<sup>138</sup> See below.

absence, to tell Chamberlain that they expected him to announce to the House that the government was going to honour its obligation to Poland. When the Prime Minister spoke, however, he talked of the possibility of a conference. Greenwood then rose to express the Labour Party's hope 'that there shall be no more devices for dragging out what has already been dragged out for too long'.<sup>139</sup> Chamberlain denied that the government was weakening; but after the House rose, his colleagues made it clear to him that an ultimatum must be sent to Germany. It was delivered early the next morning, 3 September 1939, with a deadline of 11 a.m. No reply having then arrived, Chamberlain announced on the radio that Britain was at war.

The Labour Movement entered the war in good spirits, and with its reputation standing high. Most of the credit for this must go to the trade unions and their leaders. With their differing factions, the Labour Party leaders were unable to adopt an equally clear and consistent policy on the approach of war. Factions were at work in the unions also, but they did not have much influence at the apex of the trade union movement. In his *Short History of the Labour Party*<sup>140</sup> Pelling entitled the chapter that deals with this period 'The General Council's Party'. While this sobriquet may have been an acceptable description of the relationship between the party and the trade unions at the time of the electoral débâcle of 1931 and in the following three or four years, the party recovered its strength and independence thereafter, partly as a result of its gains in the 1935 election, and these characteristics were considerably fortified by the reform of the party's constitution in 1937, and by the decision to apply the new clauses immediately.

Middlemas has characterized the relationship at this time of the government with the unions, and also with the employers' organizations, as one of increasing 'corporate bias':

This system is not corporatism, but one where *corporate bias* predominates. The association of governing institutions, committed ultimately to a consensual view of the national interest, reduced sharply and permanently the power of interests and organisations still outside the threshold: and the harmony which was achieved, as a result, enabled governments of the 1930s and 40s to maintain order and consent and to survive the Second World War as no other European state did.<sup>141</sup>

This characterization of the relationship between unions, employers' organizations, and the state holds considerable force for the situation in

<sup>139</sup> HC. Debs. (2 Sept. 1939), col. 283. Hansard does not record Amery's shout from the Conservative benches, 'Speak for England, Arthur', which was noted by A. J. P. Taylor, 452).

<sup>140</sup> H. M. Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party* (London: Macmillan, 1968), ch. 6.

<sup>141</sup> Keith Middlemas, *Politics and Industrial Society* (London: André Deutsch, 1979), 374.

the late thirties. However, it must be qualified by a recognition of the fierce insistence of the unions on their independence from the state. Without that independence, their hold over their members would have been eroded, and their value as partners in a system of corporate bias diminished.

*The Unions and the Left*

Prior to 1933 the Communist International had been pursuing a policy of 'class against class' which identified social democratic parties, including the Labour Party, and the leaders of the trade unions allied with these parties, as the agents of the bourgeoisie in its repression of the working class. The task of Communist parties in capitalist countries was therefore to expose the duplicity of the social democratic parties and the union leaders, and to try to win over their members. After Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the Communist International and the communist parties switched to a 'united front' policy which regarded the socialists and the trade union leaders as potential allies in a joint working-class opposition to Fascism. Later their objective was widened into a 'popular front' which went beyond the boundaries of socialism and the working class to include liberal and radical parties and any other organizations prepared to join them in the defence of democracy against the dictators. The British Communist Party dutifully made approaches to the Labour Party and Congress, which were rejected by the National Executive and the General Council. However, the Communists were not wholly isolated. The Independent Labour Party also favoured a united front, and in 1933 came to an agreement with the Communist Party for joint action against Fascism. At the Labour Party Conference in 1934 the reference back of the National Executive's rejection of the united front was moved, only to be 'overwhelmingly defeated'.<sup>142</sup> In 1936 the electoral victories of popular-front alliances in France and Spain, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War won increased support within the Labour Party for a united front or a popular front in Britain. At the Labour Party Conference in 1936 the Engineers moved a resolution instructing the National Executive 'to meet representatives of all working-class bodies to bring about a "United Front" which secured the relatively respectable total of 435,000 votes, with 1,805,000 against.'<sup>143</sup> Even more impressive was the vote of 592,000 for accepting the affiliation of the Communist Party, supported by the Miners, in view of 'the need for the Unity of the Working-class Movement'.<sup>144</sup> Further

<sup>142</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1934), 138.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* (1936), 250-5.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* 207-11.



support for the campaign came from Victor Gollancz's highly successful Left Book Club and its local groups, the Co-operative-owned popular Sunday paper *Reynolds' News*, and the Labour League of Youth. At its conference that year the league had passed a resolution in favour of a united front 'of all Working-class Youth Organisations' which, along with other misdemeanours, led the National Executive to take disciplinary measures against it.<sup>145</sup> At the same conference the National Executive reported that a special conference of the Socialist League had approved a 'United Campaign' with the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party. The executive held that this action offended against a resolution passed at the 1934 conference, which decided that united action with the Communist Party or ancillary organizations 'without the sanction of the National Executive Committee' was 'incompatible with membership of the Labour Party',<sup>146</sup> and ruled that continued membership of the league after 1 June 1937 would render those concerned ineligible for membership of the Labour Party. Before that date the league decided to dissolve, 'it being understood that its members would continue to support the "Unity" proposals in their individual capacity'.<sup>147</sup> The National Executive had also decided to use its powers under standing orders<sup>148</sup> to debar all resolutions on the united front that had been submitted that year, so that the only way the matter could be raised was in the discussion of its report.<sup>149</sup> Accordingly, Cripps moved the reference back of that section of the report, and lost by 1,730,000 votes to 373,000.<sup>150</sup>

The supporters of united action continued their campaign in the country, nationally mainly under the title of 'United Peace Alliance', and locally through 'Councils of Action', many of them initiated by Constituency Labour Parties. These, reported the National Executive to the 1939 conference, 'were either prevailed upon to liquidate the new organisations, or, where occasion warranted, the Parties were disaffiliated and new Parties created'.<sup>151</sup> Cripps, still a member of the executive, carried the campaign into the executive itself by submitting a 'Memorandum on Electoral Arrangements' urging the formation of a popular front open to every group opposed to the National government, and asking for a meeting to discuss it. The meeting was held on 13 January 1939. Cripps spoke to his memorandum, and moved its acceptance, seconded by D. N. Pritt. He was defeated by 17 votes to 3. At the next meeting, on 18 January, Cripps and Pritt complained of a report in the *Daily Herald* which gave details of the discussion on 13 January and the names of the three supporters of the memorandum.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* 71-5.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* (1934), 13.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* (1937), 27.

<sup>148</sup> Standing Order 2, section 4.

<sup>149</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1937), 28.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 156-64.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* (1939), 42-3.

They attributed the leak to the 'office', which was denied. The others complained that Cripps had circulated the memorandum widely, without giving notice of his intention to do so. Had he notified them, the executive would have issued its own statement. The matter was referred to the Organization Sub-committee which proposed to the executive on 25 January that Cripps should 'reaffirm his allegiance to the Constitution, Programme, Principles and Policy of the Party', and withdraw his memorandum; otherwise he should be excluded from the party. He refused. The meeting thereupon endorsed the report, and Cripps left.

On 22 February the executive warned Labour Members of Parliament and parliamentary candidates currently 'participating in organised activity against the fundamental principles of the Party' to 'cease such activity'. As a result Sir Charles Trevelyan, Aneurin Bevan, and G. R. Strauss were also expelled from the party. More constituency parties were disaffiliated and replaced. At the executive meeting on 22 March, Pritt, seconded by Susan Lawrence, moved that, in view of the critical international situation, no further action should be taken against Cripps or the other party members concerned, and that negotiations be opened with Cripps to terminate the dissension. They lost by 18 votes to 3.<sup>152</sup> No longer a member of the party, Cripps was not entitled to appeal to conference, due to meet at the end of May, but, when it met, the conference voted by a narrow margin to suspend standing orders and the constitution to hear him. However, his speech was not a stirring defence of the policies he had advocated in his memorandum, but a legalistic assertion of his rights as a party member, as he saw them. The reference back of the executive's decision was proposed, but lost by 2,100,000 votes to 402,000.<sup>153</sup> The next move was for Cripps and the others who had been expelled to apply for readmission. Their applications came before the executive on 28 June, and found the executive for the first time seriously divided on the matter. J. E. Swan of the Miners' Federation moved they should be accepted; Morrison moved that they be rejected; and George Ridley of the Railway Clerks moved that a special committee be appointed to consider them. The first motion was lost by 20 votes to 4, the second by 13 votes to 12, and the third carried by 12 votes to 11. When the third was put as a substantive motion it was carried by 11 votes to 3. The result, in the end, was that the expulsions stood.

Although the unions played their part in the controversies over the united front, the popular front, and the Cripps Memorandum, their part had generally been to provide the substantial majorities that had in most

<sup>152</sup> National Executive Committee, *Minutes* (13, 18, 25 Jan., 22 Feb., 22 Mar. 1939).

<sup>153</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1939), 226-36.

instances loyally voted against the Left at conference and on the executive. The unions had not been torn by the issues as had the constituency parties. The unions had their own distinct difficulties with the Left. One of these related to the organization of the unemployed. Since 1928 the General Council had encouraged and assisted trades councils to set up associations for the unemployed to supplement the services that individual unions offered their unemployed members. Many unions allowed such members to keep their names on the books for a nominal contribution in order to be 'in benefit' as soon as they started work again, and to take part in branch activities. This form of association flourished especially in the mining communities where the activities of the union 'lodge' formed an important part of the life of the community. However, since 1921 there had existed a National Unemployed Workers' Movement, led by a Communist, Walter Hannington, and dominated by the Communist Party, whose main purpose was to organize the unemployed to agitate for improvements in their treatment and conditions, by calling attention to the inadequacy of their current benefits and the hardships imposed on them and their families. Their most spectacular means of achieving this was the 'hunger march'. Groups of unemployed men and sometimes women were assembled in various centres around the country with routes arranged to include convenient nightly stops where sympathetic local groups would arrange meals and lodging for them. They converged on London at a given date, where there were mass meetings, lobbying of Members of Parliament, and attempts to present their case at the bar of the House of Commons, or directly to the Prime Minister.

In January 1934 the leaders of the movement won a legal case against Lord Trenchard, chief commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, for trespass and seizure of documents from their London headquarters, in which their case was argued by Cripps and Pritt. On the previous day another march had begun with 500 Scottish unemployed setting off from Glasgow. They met with contingents from other parts of the country in Hyde Park on Sunday, 25 February. The following days were occupied by a 'congress', conferences, meetings, unsuccessful deputations to Downing Street and the House of Commons, and terminated on 7 March when the marchers returned home by train, at reduced fares agreed with the railway companies.<sup>154</sup> The unemployed associations sponsored by the General Council of course took no part in the march and had nothing equally dramatic and exhilarating to offer their members. The main objectives of the march had been stated as the

<sup>154</sup> Walter Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles, 1919-1936* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936), ch. 17.



restoration of the cuts made in unemployment benefit in 1931 and the abolition of the means test. The movement could therefore claim a victory in April when the Chancellor announced that half of the cuts were to be restored as part of his budget measures. The movement went into action again at the beginning of 1935 when the new national scales of assistance for the unemployed who had exhausted their entitlement to benefit replaced the rates of the local public assistance committees which were in many instances more generous. This time there was no national demonstration, but a large number of local marches and meetings, many of them especially in mining areas, organized jointly with trade unions. A final march took place in the autumn of 1936, to protest against the means test, and to try to influence the government's decisions on the new standard scales of unemployment assistance which were then being prepared. From South Wales came a contingent 'over 500 strong and in the marchers' council were several MPs including Nye Bevan and S. O. Davies'.<sup>155</sup> The marchers met in Hyde Park on 8 November, and achieved a notable success when a deputation of marchers was received by the Minister of Labour.

These activities presented difficulties for the General Council. Since 1924 the trades councils had been the local agents of the Council, and since 1926 they had operated under model rules approved by the Council which had debarred association with the Minority Movement, then the main Communist-inspired trade union organization. The Council had ceased to recognize the Unemployed Workers' Movement in 1927 because of its association with the Communist Party; but trades councils were nevertheless often involved in local activities along with Communists. In organizing hunger marches it was natural for the Unemployed Workers' Movement to turn to the trades councils for help in arranging meals and accommodation along the route, and it was almost inevitable that the two bodies should co-operate over demonstrations such as those arranged to protest against the cuts in unemployment assistance in the early months of 1935. It was inevitable that some local trade union branches in which Communist influence was strong should appoint Communists as their delegates to local trades councils, and that these delegates should encourage such co-operation.

As a result of associations of this kind the General Council had agreed unanimously on 24 October 1934:

That any Trades Council which admits members of any disruptive body, such as the Communist Party and the British Union of Fascists, to its membership, shall cease to receive recognition from the Trades Union Congress General Council, and that the Executives of the affiliated Unions be requested to do all

<sup>155</sup> William Paynter, *My Generation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), 103.



in their power to see that persons associated with disruptive organisations are debarred from pursuing their tactics in any official capacity in the Trade Union Movement including Trades Councils.<sup>156</sup>

Two days later two circulars were issued, No. 16 to trades councils and No. 17 to affiliated unions. Both set out the Council's complaints against the activities of 'disruptive elements in trades councils'. After that, Circular 16 declared that any council 'which admits delegates who are associated with Communist or Fascist organisations . . . shall be removed from the list of Trades Councils recognised by Congress' and asked them to let Citrine know 'as soon as possible' their decisions on the matter. Circular 17 asked unions to consider drawing up regulations, or amending their rules, 'so as to empower them to reject the nominations of members of disruptive bodies for any official position within your organisation' and asked for their views 'at your earliest convenience'.<sup>157</sup> On 17 April 1935 the Council decided that trades councils that had not replied to Circular 16 by 11 May would not be entitled to representation at the Annual Conference of Trades Councils which was to be held on 25 May. Nothing further was done until the matter had been debated by Congress in September. There Citrine explained the Council's actions. Will Lawther moved the reference back of the relevant section of the Council's report, saying that 'if there is anything in the conception and ideal of democracy within the organisation, it ought to be left to the unions concerned to determine their own course of action'. Jack Little, the Engineers' president, moved a resolution declining 'to accept interference with the autonomy of the Unions in the choice of their representatives' and calling on the Council 'to withdraw the recommendations'. After a long debate, the reference back was defeated by 1,869,000 votes to 1,427,000 and Little's resolution by 1,944,000 to 539,000.<sup>158</sup>

The General Council had won, but it had gained very little. It could not order unions to change their rules, except by threatening disaffiliation, and it had not even considered asking Congress for authority to do that. All that the Council could be said to have achieved was the acceptance by Congress of the instructions it had issued to the trades councils. The following year it reported to Congress that, as a result of the decisions taken in 1935,

a number of those Councils which had strenuously resisted the application of the policy reconsidered their attitude and decided to conform, and at the

<sup>156</sup> It may seem strange that the Council felt it necessary to warn trades councils against admitting Fascists, but in the early thirties British Fascists paid considerable attention to organizing among the unemployed.

<sup>157</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1935), 110-12.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* 260-80.

present time approximately 350 Trades Councils have informed the General Council that they are implementing national policy on this subject. Two Trades Councils, Clydach and Croydon, maintain their opposition . . . and have been removed from the register of Councils recognised by Congress. The Trades Councils at Watford, Bedford and Hendon, have been re-formed and are now in line with national policy, while Croydon Trades Council is also being reconstructed.<sup>159</sup>

Individual unions also had difficulties with Communists. An account of the development and activities of the London busmen's rank-and-file movement has already been given in Chapter 1; but nothing has been said about its relationship with the Communist Party. Bevin had always believed that the movement was inspired and directed by that party. In 1936 he reported to his executive in relation to the Central Bus Committee that he had

learned only just recently, while we have been endeavouring to carry out your policy on the Members' behalf, unofficial meetings have been held in London in conjunction with certain Communists and gentlemen from the Labour Research Department with a view to putting over an entirely different programme and policy. We ask the Members whether what we hear is true. They deny it, and next minute they are carrying it out.<sup>160</sup>

The high standard of the movement's journal, *Busman's Punch*, was due largely to the skill of its 'technical editor', Emile Burns, a Communist official and author, and a leading figure in the Labour Research Department.<sup>161</sup>

The Communist Party itself claimed credit for switching the emphasis of its trade union work from the Minority Movement to rank-and-file movements in 1932.<sup>162</sup> In the early days of the London busmen's movement only two of its leaders were acknowledged Communists, and it was only after the defeat of the Coronation bus strike that two more, Bert Papworth and Bill Jones—who were subsequently to be, one after the other, elected to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress—announced that they had joined the party. Too much attention, however, need not be attached to that. It was a common practice of the Communist Party to recruit as 'secret' members those who had some reason for not acknowledging their membership, or for whom the party itself had some purpose which would be better served if

<sup>159</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1936), 113.

<sup>160</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *General Secretary's Second Quarterly Report* (1936).

<sup>161</sup> The Labour Research Department was a descendant of the Webbs' Fabian Research Department which broke away from the Fabian Society in the war, after the department had fallen under Communist influence.

<sup>162</sup> J. R. Campbell, in *Communist International*, 12/16.

their membership was not known. When circumstances changed, their adherence to the party could be announced. So they, and other leaders of the movement, may have been members before the strike.

After the defeat of the strike, the union executive suspended the Central Bus Committee and the garage delegates, and instructed the full-time officers of the section and the branch secretaries to take over their work, pending an inquiry. This decision was announced on 7 June 1937. In July the union's biennial conference endorsed the executive's action and voted to terminate the rank-and-file movement and similar organizations in the union. In an appendix to Bevin's *Third Quarterly Report* for 1937 he included an account of the examination by the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the executive, which was conducting the inquiry, of Emile Burns, who, it was revealed, was a member of the Combined Road Transport Commercial and General Workers' branch of the union in Kilburn. The committee did not accept his description 'of the gatherings in his private house'. It concluded that it was 'against the interests of the Union that Emile Burns should remain a member', and also found he was ineligible under a decision of the executive in 1929 'that persons who are engaged in occupations not coming within the scope of the Union's activities must not be admitted' except with the approval of the executive. His contributions were returned. Meanwhile the committee's proposals that disciplinary action be taken against the leaders of the movement, including the expulsion of Papworth, Payne, and Jones, had been approved by the executive. They had appealed, and their appeals had been rejected. Snelling's case had not been settled because he was in hospital. In December he was debarred from holding office in the union until 1941.

The question of setting up their own union was debated by what was left of the rank-and-file movement. The Communist Party was strongly opposed to such a step, and so were Papworth and Jones. Snelling was for it, and he had support outside the union. W. J. Brown, general secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association and an old adversary of Bevin, offered his services to the London busmen immediately after the strike. By this time, the London busmen were beginning to recover their spirit, and Bevin was beginning to relent. A new Central Bus Committee, with narrowly limited powers, had been elected. The committee asked the executive to restore its old powers and to reconsider the expulsions. Bevin, in his *Fourth Quarterly Report* for 1937, said that the loss of membership in the London bus section had been 'nothing like what I expected' and that the section was 'to be congratulated on having put the Union first despite all diversity of opinion'. In February 1938 the National Passenger Workers' Union was formed with Snelling as its secretary and Brown as its honorary

president. Only eight out of 150 branch officers in the section were reported to have joined the new union. 'It recruited mainly young members, and its centres were in Merton Garage (Mr. Snelling's) and Sutton Garage.'<sup>163</sup> On 7 March 1938 the union's executive recorded 'great appreciation of the solidarity shown to the Union by the Passenger Services Group' in the face of the breakaway; and on 8 April it announced that, if Papworth and Jones and two others who had been expelled or suspended were to make applications to be reinstated and give assurances, they would be readmitted. Papworth and Jones complied.

Another rank-and-file movement emerged in 1935 in the aircraft industry due to the ever-mounting government orders for military aircraft. Given this expansion it is not surprising that trade union militants, whose reputations as trouble-makers had kept them on the dole for years, found jobs without much difficulty in the new aircraft factories, and were soon elected shop stewards and processing grievances with foremen and managers. Aircraft construction involved the manufacture of engines and the building of airframes. The first task was the province of the Engineers. Wooden frames, which had been the province of the woodworking unions, had been replaced by metal frames which were the domain of the sheet-metal-working unions, mainly the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers, who, like the Engineers, had a reputation for militancy. A number of the new factories were sited in west London where disputes over piece-rates began to surface in 1934. In February 1935 a strike over the introduction of a non-unionist into the toolroom at Gloster's factory led to a strike of the Engineers there, followed by other departments. When the man concerned joined the union, the issue shifted to bonus. The strike committee contacted the shop stewards at Hawkers' factory where the men voted to strike in sympathy. Here the strike was led mainly by the Sheet Metal Workers. Collections were held in other aircraft factories on behalf of the strikers, who had struck unofficially and could expect no strike pay from their unions.<sup>164</sup>

On 17 March there was a conference of work-place delegates from a number of aircraft factories. The delegates decided on further collections for the men on strike and the calling of mass meetings at all aircraft factories to agree a common set of demands, including a national agreement for aircraft workers in addition to the general engineering agreement. On 27 March the strikers decided on a 'united return to

<sup>163</sup> Clegg, *London Transport*, 129.

<sup>164</sup> Much of the information given here about the aircraft shop-stewards' movement is taken from Nina Fishman 'The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions' (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1991).



work' without having won any concessions from their employers. A second conference of work-place delegates was held on 28 April, when an Aircraft Shop Stewards' National Council was founded, to work for 100 per cent unionism throughout the aircraft factories, but, since conditions varied from one factory to the next, to collect information on existing conditions before formulating other demands. A further meeting in August approved plans for a monthly journal to be called the *New Propeller*. A Communist official and journalist, Peter Zinkin, who had got himself elected to the Hawkers' strike committee, now found himself playing among the aircraft shop stewards the role occupied by Emile Burns in the London busmen's rank-and-file movement—and more; for he was not only appointed editor of the *New Propeller*, but acted as unofficial secretary to the Aircraft Shop Stewards' national council.

A special issue of the new journal set out the aims and objectives of the council. In addition to 100 per cent trade-unionism, with shop stewards in each department and a works committee in each factory, and the publication of a monthly bulletin, it aimed to enforce all trade union agreements; and it added two other objectives: 'To co-ordinate the activities of all workers in the aircraft factories and the trade union branches in order to secure higher wages and better conditions. To secure through the trade unions a national agreement relative to rates of pay and conditions of employment.' This demand for a separate agreement for aircraft workers, repeated at meeting after meeting of the council, became the central objective of the movement, akin to the demand for a seven-hour working day (and later a 7½-hour working day) for the London busmen's rank-and-file movement; and steps towards its achievement became a test of the council's success.

Meanwhile the *New Propeller* recorded a series of disputes and concessions through 1936. In December 1935 a strike at Fairey's over the method of rate-fixing, where previously the 'price' had been recorded on the man's card without telling him what it was, had led to an agreement that the rate-fixer must 'fix the rate with the man at the bench', so that, if the latter was dissatisfied, he could challenge it at once.<sup>165</sup> The Handley Page toolroom secured an increase in its time-rate.<sup>166</sup> The threat of a strike in the sheet-metal department of A. V. Roe's in Manchester led to an agreement that all piece-work prices should yield 'time and a half'.<sup>167</sup> Strikes at De Havilland's over shop stewards' recognition and at Fairey's over the employment of trainees on skilled work without the skilled rate of pay also won concessions, and raised factory collections totalling £242 and £487 respectively.<sup>168</sup> In

<sup>165</sup> *New Propeller*, 1/4 (Jan. 1936).

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* 1/5.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* 1/7.

June 1936 there was news of progress towards the main objective. The Engineers' National Committee had resolved 'That in view of the ability of the Aircraft Section of the Engineering Industry to pay higher wages and conditions to the workers engaged therein, Executive Council is instructed to negotiate agreements either individually or collectively with Aircraft Employers'.<sup>169</sup> The resolution went on to set out the rates and conditions that the executive was to obtain in the agreement.

However, the Aircraft Shop Stewards' Council was not content to leave the matter in the hands of the Engineers' executive. At its meeting on 12 July it decided to ballot aircraft workers on whether to strike for an aircraft agreement.<sup>170</sup> On 6 September it met again to hear the result. There were 6,258 votes for a strike and 2,527 against. It debated whether to call a strike or not, and finally adjourned for a month.<sup>171</sup> The debate was resumed on 11 October when it was agreed that the works committees should submit the proposed rates and conditions to the management of each factory on 5 January 1937, and 'If the full demands are not met by February 28, 1937, it is further recommended to the Works Committees, that this be set, as the limit, after which the question of other action must be discussed'.<sup>172</sup> The official union claim for a separate aircraft agreement was submitted to the engineering employers in February 1937, and the Aircraft Shop Stewards' Council proposed that an official strike ballot be conducted if the claim was rejected.<sup>173</sup> It was turned down in May, but there was no ballot. On 2 May, before it had heard of the failure of the claim, the council decided that it should call a strike for its claims for 25 May, on the assumption that the engineering employers would not have conceded before then.<sup>174</sup> It met again on 23 May when it was agreed that, as the engineering unions were due to present a wage-claim on behalf of all engineering workers on 26 May, 'nothing should be done to impede the meeting on May 26th' so 'no strike action should be taken at this stage'.<sup>175</sup> Evidently the aircraft shop stewards were reluctant to find themselves running a national strike. Fishman suggests that there are at least three reasons to account for the course events had taken. First, the only enthusiast for a strike was Zinkin. For him, the proposed national aircraft agreement 'was the rallying cry with which all aircraft workers would unite and be organised to fight the employers in a full-scale battle'.<sup>176</sup> Secondly, 'the aircraft stewards whom he had so assiduously cultivated, and, as he thought, trained in militant trade unionism, had ceased to believe either in the Council's efficacy or in the need for an Aircraft Agreement'.<sup>177</sup> The local concessions on wages and conditions which continued to be

<sup>169</sup> *New Propeller*, 1/10.<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* (Nov. 1936).<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.* (July 1937).<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* 1/11.<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, special issue (May 1937).<sup>176</sup> Fishman.<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* 1/12.<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* (Mar. 1937).<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

reported from the aircraft factories in the pages of the *New Propeller* through 1937 and after were satisfying the ambitions of the aircraft workers. The third reason was that the leaders of the Communist Party did not want an aircraft strike, and restrained Zinkin's zeal at crucial moments. Nor did they believe in the practicability or the professed advantages of a separate aircraft agreement.

In 1934 there had also been the beginnings of a general rank-and-file movement among the Engineers with local conferences of shop stewards, and a rank-and-file journal, the *Engineers' Bulletin*, was launched. However, the very success of the Communist Party members within the union led them to believe that such a movement was unnecessary. The party's goals could be achieved through the constitutional machinery of the union. Success in the use of this machinery can be gauged by the progress of Communists in union elections. In 1934 they held the posts of district president in Glasgow, Sheffield, and Coventry, and in 1937 Claude Berridge was elected president of the London district. The number of Communists elected to the national committee rose from one in 1933 to two in 1934, three in 1935, five in 1937. Communists were chosen to serve on the union's delegation to the Trades Union Congress. In 1935 Joe Scott was elected divisional organizer, as was Billy Stokes in 1937 (but he left the party soon afterwards), and Claude Berridge in 1939. Although Jack Tanner had broken with the Minority Movement in 1931 rather than forfeit the post of London divisional organizer to which he had recently been elected, he continued for some years to sympathize with many policies supported by the Communists. In 1934 he was elected to the union's executive council, and in 1939 he succeeded Jack Little as president. The party also received some assistance from the union's judicial body, the final appeal committee. In 1937 Claude Berridge was expelled by the executive for addressing a meeting of Rolls-Royce strikers at Derby without first seeking the permission of the union's district secretary there. He appealed and was reinstated by the final appeal committee. In 1936 the national committee voted to affiliate the union to the Labour Research Department. With these successes to show, the Communists among the Engineers were able to resist pressure from their party to develop a distinct rank-and-file movement. Their union was itself a rank-and-file movement, they argued:

These movements are here, right here amongst us—so there is no need to go scratching and searching for rank and file activities, nor to contemplate for one moment 'setting up rank and file movements'. Such a suggestion would only serve to show colossal ignorance of the situation, or what is more serious a deep seated sectarianism.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>178</sup> *Statement on a Rank-and-File Movement in the Metal Industry* (Aug. 1935), quoted in Fishman.

The rank-and-file movement in the railway unions was called the Railwaymen's Vigilance Movement, reviving the title of the committee that had flourished during and after the First World War. At a conference in February 1934 there assembled fifty-one delegates from branches of the Railwaymen, twenty-six from branches of the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, and two from the Railway Clerks, along with others from depot or local vigilance committees. The organizer of the movement was a Communist, W. C. Loeber, who was elected to the Railwaymen's executive in 1937, and its supporters included J. B. Figgins from Glasgow, who was elected general secretary in 1947.<sup>179</sup> 'Left-wingers were . . . increasingly elected to the Annual General Meeting, to the Executive, and to full-time office; perhaps the most notable success was the election of the relatively inexperienced and little-known J. Potts as President in 1938.'<sup>180</sup>

The Communist success that was to have the most important effects in the future occurred in the Electrical Trades Union just before the war. Following a seven-week strike of electricians over extra pay for abnormal conditions on a contracting job at the Earls Court Exhibition site at the beginning of 1937,<sup>181</sup> the members of the London district committee that had instructed the men to come out without the authority of the executive were expelled from the union for bringing 'discredit on the union'. In the elections for the executive later in the year several sitting members lost their seats, and in 1938 a popular and charismatic Communist, Walter Stevens, was elected to a full-time officer's post in the London area. He became London area secretary in 1940, and was then elected assistant general secretary in 1942. Another Communist, Frank Foulkes, was elected national organizer, and subsequently president.

Communists also played a significant part among the Miners, especially in South Wales and Scotland. In South Wales the leading figure was Arthur Horner. He was released from prison in December 1932 after serving a sentence for unlawful assembly and riot, and soon afterwards elected checkweighman by the miners at one of the Mardy pits. The pit was closed, and his election was declared void by the South Wales Miners' executive on the grounds that he was not a member of the union, having been expelled with his lodge when the latter refused to give an undertaking not to spend union funds in supporting Communist election candidates, as they had done when Horner stood for Parliament

<sup>179</sup> Bagwell, 522.

<sup>180</sup> Richard Hyman, 'Rank-and-File Movements and Workplace Organisation 1934-1939', in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations*, ii. 1914-1939 (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), 151.

<sup>181</sup> See above.



in the Rhondda division in 1929 and 1931. He stood again in a by-election in 1933 and came close to defeating the Labour candidate, who had, of course, the support of the South Wales Miners' Federation. There was by now a rank-and-file movement among the South Wales Miners with a fortnightly journal, *South Wales Miner*, which Horner edited. Later in the year he stood for election as a miners' agent (full-time official) in the anthracite area. On this occasion he was not debarred as a non-member 'because of the Anthracite District's precedent of having previously allowed non-members to stand and by virtue of the EC being unwilling to contest the point',<sup>182</sup> and was elected. By the end of the year he had been elected also to the South Wales Miners' executive and in 1936 he became its president.

One of the chief objectives of Communist miners at this time was the destruction of the 'non-political' unions. These had been formed in several coalfields during the 1926 lockout to organize a return to work on the owners' terms for those miners who were willing to leave, or be expelled from, the Miners' Federation. It was an objective shared by all loyal members of the federation; but the Communists showed outstanding zeal and determination in its pursuit. The most significant of these non-political unions were in Nottinghamshire and South Wales. They were officially called 'industrial unions' because they aimed to concentrate on industrial issues; and the popular name 'non-political' made the same point: that they believed the federation and other trade unions had been led astray by their links with the Labour Party.

At the Emlyn Colliery in Horner's new territory the company had recognized the South Wales Miners' Industrial Union, whose leader was William Gregory, but many of the miners had also taken out cards of the South Wales Miners' Federation once more. In April 1934 they disbanded the industrial union's branch in favour of the federation's lodge, elected a Communist as checkweighman, and launched a strike over minimum wage payments and the right of the lodge to decide questions of seniority in the pit. After nine weeks the company gave way and in doing so recognized the federation. The main supporter of the industrial union was the Ocean Coal Company, most of whose collieries were in Monmouthshire, and after the victory at Emlyn Colliery the federation decided to tackle the two main bastions of the industrial union, the Taff-Merthyr and Bedwas Collieries of the Ocean Coal Company in the Bedlinog valley. Horner was given six months' leave from the anthracite district to assist the campaign which was mainly organized by a committee of unemployed miners. The South Wales Miners' Federation was one of the unions that strongly encouraged

<sup>182</sup> Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), 191.

unemployed members to maintain their membership of the union for a nominal contribution. As the miners' lodge was one of the main institutions in the community life of a mining village, it followed that the federation lodge might remain a powerful organization even where the pit was controlled by the industrial union. The federation decided to open its campaign with Taff-Merthyr, and, by exerting community pressure in Bedlinog village, it managed to bring the majority of men in the colliery out on strike for recognition of the federation in the autumn of 1934, despite the presence of a large body of police in the village. The company threatened to close the colliery, and the federation had to settle for the promise of a secret ballot under an independent person to choose between the two unions, after an interval to allow calm to be restored. Only a minority of strikers were re-employed, however, and there were a number of convictions for intimidation. Then the company allowed the industrial union to organize a ballot, held at the colliery under the supervision of a firm of Cardiff solicitors which, of course, gave a majority for the industrial union. The federation managed to fend off demands for a strike of the whole coalfield; and the Secretary for Mines intervened with another compromise solution, including an arbitrator to hear the claims of men who believed they should have been reinstated under the terms of the first agreement. Nevertheless the industrial union remained in control of Taff-Merthyr; and the leadership of the federation had to face severe criticism.

A new method of industrial pressure was brought into action in the following year at Nine Mile Point Colliery, also owned by Ocean Coal.<sup>183</sup> Following the example of Hungarian miners in a wage dispute not long before, the men on the day shift decided, on 12 October 1935, to stay down the pit at the end of their shift. At first the company refused to allow food to be sent down to them, but they relented the next day, and each day thereafter there was 'a procession of wives and mothers to the pit-head bringing sandwiches and Welsh cakes and flasks of tea to sustain their husbands and sons'.<sup>184</sup> At several other pits, including Taff-Merthyr, the men imitated their example with stay-in strikes against the industrial union, and elsewhere many more pits were struck in the traditional manner, in sympathy with the Nine Mile Point men, until there were, according to the Ministry of Labour, 55,000 men on strike.<sup>185</sup> Again the Secretary for Mines, now Captain Crookshank, intervened. The company insisted on closing Nine Mile Point, but agreed to meet federation officials, after a short period, to discuss a resumption of work, with no mention of the industrial union. Even more

<sup>183</sup> Francis and Smith locate Nine Mile Point at Cwmfelinfach and the Ministry of Labour at Ynysddu. The two villages are adjacent.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* 279.

<sup>185</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Jan. 1936).

favourable agreements were signed at some of the other collieries. No settlement, however, was reached at Taff-Merthyr and Bedwas, where the police had been active, leading to a number of prosecutions and convictions.

In 1936 attention in the federation's conflict with non-political unionism was switched to Nottingham where the Nottinghamshire Miners' Industrial Union was officially recognized by the coalowners' association and the federation's affiliate, the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, had to struggle on as best it could. It had increased its membership by about 1,500 in 1934 to about 10,000, ahead of the industrial union,<sup>186</sup> despite the continued success of the latter union's general secretary, George Spencer, as a negotiator and 'an expert in Compensation Law';<sup>187</sup> and it had succeeded in opening a new branch at Harworth which had 157 members by the end of the year.

As the result of a letter from the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association asking for the help of the Miners' Federation in dealing with 'the unsatisfactory conditions' in their coalfield, the officials of the federation met the council of the association on 2 February 1935 when the council gave the federation 'full power to take what action it desires to complete and restore the organisation in its full capacity to negotiate for and on behalf of the miners of the Nottinghamshire coalfield'. Thus armed, the federation executive had to devise a strategy to defeat the Nottinghamshire coalowners. It could authorize a strike of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, but, with less than a quarter of the miners in the county in membership, the association, even with the financial assistance of the Miners' Federation behind it, would be unable to bring many of the collieries to a halt. It could call a national miners' strike, but its success would depend on the pressure that the government could be induced to bring to bear on the owners, and that would in turn depend on the attitude that Parliament and the press would take towards the merits of the case. It had also to consider how long the miners elsewhere would be prepared to stay out on such an issue. As it was, the association waited to see what would turn up.

By June 1935 its membership at Harworth had risen to 300 and a Communist, Michael Kane, had been elected president of the branch.<sup>188</sup> Grievances accumulated in the pit, but the manager refused to discuss them with Kane and the branch delegate. A strike was called, and then called off on the advice of the association, to allow its officials to talk to the manager. But he would not see them, and refused to re-employ twenty-five of the strikers, including Kane. At this point the

<sup>186</sup> A. R. Griffin, *The Miners of Nottinghamshire, 1914-1944* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962), 255.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* 252.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* 259.

national federation took over. Edwards wrote to the company asking it to meet him and the president, Joseph Jones. It refused, and continued to refuse when Edwards got the Mines Department to intercede on the federation's behalf. The federation then arranged a ballot at Harworth, supervised by a Justice of the Peace. The outcome was 1,175 for the association and 145 for the industrial union, whose members had been instructed not to vote.

One of the grievances of the face-workers at Harworth was the exceptionally large deductions from their pay ascribed to dirt in the coal, and the association members now took up this issue. By December no further progress had been made, and the federation authorized those still at work to strike. A special national conference was called for 20 January 1937 when Horner, now a member of the national executive, was the appropriate choice to move, on their behalf, a resolution empowering them to conduct a national strike ballot, and to approach the Trades Union Congress 'to enlist the support of the whole Trade Union Movement'. On 8 February Kane's appeal against a sentence of two months' imprisonment for intimidation imposed by the Nottinghamshire magistrates was dismissed. In the same month Spencer provided a way out of everyone's difficulties. Captain Crookshank arranged a meeting between the Miners' Federation and the Nottinghamshire Industrial Union at which Spencer proposed an amalgamation between the two Nottinghamshire unions. His terms, including the posts in the amalgamated union to be reserved for himself and his colleagues, were stiff. With such a prize in view, however, the leaders of the federation were not disposed to haggle too much, and the heads of an agreement were provisionally settled; but the federation would not approve them until the company agreed to reinstate the men who had been victimized at Harworth. With sublime obstinacy the company refused to do so until the amalgamation was accomplished. Accordingly, the federation went ahead with a national ballot for a strike 'with the object of securing recognition of the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain and adequate assurances to prevent victimisation at Harworth Colliery' which was sanctioned by another special conference on 2 April. The voting was 444,546 to 61,445 for a strike. The federation executive received the figures on 20 April and summoned yet another national conference for 30 April to decide on handing in notices.

The Nottinghamshire owners maintained their refusal to meet the federation, so on 29 April the two bodies (the owners being accompanied by Spencer) saw Captain Crookshank separately, and, after six hours of negotiations through him, agreed to refer the negotiations over amalgamation back to the Nottinghamshire unions and to give them



three weeks to reach a settlement. This proposal was put to the conference the next day when the delegates, tired of trying to satisfy Spencer, voted it down. They decided that notices should be handed in to expire on 22 May.

On 5 May the dispute was discussed in the House of Commons, where Baldwin praised collective bargaining, to which he said there was no alternative 'except anarchy' and appealed 'to the handful of men with whom rests peace or war to give the best present to the country that could be given at the moment, to do the one thing which would rejoice the hearts of all the people who love this country, that is, to rend and dissipate this dark cloud which has gathered over us'.<sup>189</sup> Thus entreated, the Nottinghamshire owners at last consented to meet the federation representatives, but only after the executive had postponed the presentation of strike notices, and only with Spencer present; and negotiations at the Mines Department were renewed. Posts in the new union, it was agreed, were to be divided equally between the association and the industrial union; Spencer was to be president with a seat on the federation executive. The Harworth strike was to be called off and the 350 vacancies in a reduced labour force filled by ballot. The terms were approved by another conference on 27 May. Anyone who believes that trade unions are the sole cause of industrial conflict would do well to contemplate the behaviour of the Nottinghamshire coalowners in 1936-7.

Work was resumed at Harworth on 31 May, 1937, but some of the strikers did not have long to enjoy their victory. Picketing and policing at Harworth had been rough. On 26 June seventeen strikers, who had been charged with riot, were sentenced. Five were bound over; one was sentenced to four months; one to six months; five and one miner's wife to nine months; one to twelve months; two to fifteen months; and Michael Kane to two years. There was an outcry against the harshness of the sentences. Leave to appeal was refused, but eventually, with the help of representations from the General Council,<sup>190</sup> some of the sentences were shortened.

The example of Nottinghamshire served to heal the continuing rift in South Wales. The South Wales Miners' Industrial Union was merged with the South Wales Miners' Federation, but Gregory and his colleagues were not given posts in the federation. Meanwhile another merger had been arranged in Scotland, where a series of quarrels in the miners' unions in Fife and Lanark had brought about the formation of the United Mineworkers of Scotland in 1929 under Communist control. That had been in the days when Communist policy towards the unions

<sup>189</sup> HC Debs. (5 May 1935), cols. 1186, 1190.

<sup>190</sup> See Ch. 3.

had been inspired by the slogan 'class against class'. Now that this slogan had been replaced by the 'united front', pressure was put on the United Mineworkers to rejoin the Scottish Miners' Federation; and an amalgamation was arranged.

The switch in Communist policy from 'class against class' to the 'united front' had brought considerable advantages to a number of British unions; but union leaders had reason to fear that Communists would use the positions and credit that they had won in following the 'united front' policy to further quite different objectives if they were given different guidance from Moscow.

### 3

## The War

### *The 'Phoney' War*

From the declaration of war on 3 September 1939 to the German invasion of France through Holland and Belgium in May 1940, the war was conducted far from Britain. Germany and Russia seized their shares of Poland. Russia took over the Baltic states and invaded Finland. Germany annexed Denmark and invaded Norway. Britain and France contemplated going to the aid of the Finns, and Britain had, ineffectively, sent troops to assist the Norwegians. The failure of this endeavour had the momentous consequence of replacing Chamberlain by Churchill at the head of a coalition government, for at the end of the two-day debate on the Norwegian campaign on 7–8 May the adverse votes and abstentions of Members of Parliament who normally supported the government led to Chamberlain's resignation. The new government took over just in time to watch the German army sweep through France, and to organize the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk at the end of May. However, the intervening months were not wasted. A number of preparations were made for the struggles that lay ahead. The production of armaments continued apace, most importantly of fighter aircraft and radar equipment; and steps were taken to accommodate the system of industrial relations to wartime requirements.

At the end of September 1939 the Minister of Labour, Ernest Brown, approached the Trades Union Congress and the British Employers' Confederation, as the former National Confederation of Employers' Organizations was now called, with the proposal that they should meet him to discuss arrangements 'for consultation with the Minister in time of war'. A meeting was arranged for the afternoon of 4 October, and the governing councils of the two bodies met together in the morning to discuss their response. Both of them feared that they might be pressed by the minister into exceeding the bounds of their authority. At its meeting on 27 September, the council of the confederation decided to tell the minister that any new joint body 'should be of a purely advisory character, that it should confine itself to questions of general principle and not invade the jurisdiction of the Employers' organisations in individual industries'. And when the two councils met together on 4

October, it was Citrine who insisted that 'as much as possible should be done by the industries themselves to co-ordinate their efforts without interference'. However, when they met the minister that afternoon, Citrine went into the attack on a quite different issue:

They suspected they were being deliberately held at arm's length by the Government and that the Government was trying to limit the scope of such consultations as might be necessary to what the Government might consider to be 'Labour questions'.

Another point was the general applicability of Trade Union agreements . . . In war-time there was no room for the unorganised person . . . There was an obligation upon the Government to ensure that agreements between employers and Trade Unions (if the joint bodies so desired) should be made applicable in the industry generally.

Another question . . . was the strengthening of the Trade Boards . . . They ought to be infinitely wider in their scope.

Then there was the position of unorganised industries. An inquiry should be instituted by the Minister whereby he himself could establish the proper machinery for seeing that these industries implemented the principles of collective bargaining.

After listening to this list of demands for the strengthening of collective bargaining and thereby also of trade unions, the meeting went on to consider what should be done about setting up a joint advisory body to the minister. It was decided to set up a subcommittee to draw up terms of reference.

The next day the General Council met the Prime Minister to assure him that it was 'wholeheartedly behind the Government in the prosecution of the struggle against Hitlerism', but worried about the lack of contact with government departments, especially with the Ministry of Supply. Chamberlain assured it that he would give the matter careful consideration.<sup>1</sup> On 13 October he saw Citrine again, along with the chairman of the General Council, Walter Holmes. Citrine reported to a special subcommittee of the Council on 18 October:

The PM read an instruction which he had sent around the Government Departments that prior consultation should take place with the TUC on industrial matters and that adequate representation should be asked for from the TUC on any committees which were being set up dealing with industry. [He had asked the Minister of Supply] to get in touch with the TUC with a view to forming a Central Committee of seven representatives from the General Council and seven from the employers to act as an Advisory Committee to the Ministry [and also to the Air Ministry]. . . . There would be no difficulty at all in the formation of District and Local Committees under the Ministry of Supply.

<sup>1</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (5 Oct. 1939).



A further consequence of the Prime Minister's instructions was the formation of the Advisory Committee to the Ministry of Food. The trade union side of this committee consisted of five members of the General Council with George Woodcock as secretary, and there were no employer representatives, for its purpose was different from that of consultative committees advising on the conduct of industrial relations or the production of armaments. As the minister, W. S. Morrison, explained at its inaugural meeting on 16 November: 'The Ministry was anxious to be continuously aware of how the policy and work of the Ministry was affecting people generally and he wanted the TUC to be fully informed as to the . . . reason behind its actions. It was his intention to give the Committee all the facts even though they might be highly confidential.' The General Council was in this instance being cast in the unusual role of the representative of the consumer, or at least of the working-class consumer. A civil servant was appointed to maintain day-to-day contact, and the minister undertook to see that all local food committees, of which there were about 1,500, included a trade union representative.

On 18 October the constitution of what was to be called the National Joint Advisory Council to the Minister of Labour was settled. It was to have fifteen members from each side, and to deal with 'all matters in which employers and workers have a common interest'. Following the considerable concessions he had already obtained from the government, Citrine explored what more could be gained through this new body. One of its first tasks was to issue a statement supporting voluntary savings as a contribution to the war effort. The General Council delayed releasing it until it had received an assurance that holders of war savings would not be penalized by having them taken into account if they subsequently became subject to the means test. In January 1940 it sought increases in payments made under the Workmen's Compensation Act, asserting that 'failure to take immediate steps to remedy this is bound to react on the national war effort'.<sup>2</sup> Its next attempt to take advantage of the situation was on 7 March, when a deputation asked Chamberlain to repeal or amend the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act. It had last raised this issue with him on 24 February 1939, when he said that 'he appreciated that many things had changed since the Act was passed. He thought, perhaps, the case that had been made was stronger in some parts than others', and promised to think it over.<sup>3</sup> On this occasion he offered no hope. He had to balance a possible increment in trade union support for the war effort against the certainty of Conservative indignation at what

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* (24 Jan. 1940).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* (24 Feb. 1939).

would have seemed a concession to trade union pressure on a party-political issue. The General Council issued a public protest after its next meeting on 20 March.

However, the outstanding concession secured by Citrine was over wages and prices, which were the staple topic at early meetings of the National Joint Advisory Council. The trade union members of the council were encouraged by a statement from Leggett, the chief industrial commissioner, at the first meeting of the council on 1 November, when he said that 'the voluntary machinery [of wage settlement] had so far functioned very satisfactorily under war conditions and it was difficult to foresee whether and when new legislation would be required'. In the same month, in order not to prejudice discussions at the National Joint Advisory Council, ministers 'agreed . . . that Exchequer subsidies should temporarily prevent appreciable rises in the prices of controlled foods', due to rising import costs.<sup>4</sup> The next meeting of the council, on 6 December, heard Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, deliver an elementary lecture on inflation. He also told it that the entire income of all surtax payers, 'if it were practicable to take it, would only make a very modest contribution to the total cost of the war', and that it was 'not true to say that every rise in price is unjustifiable'. Citrine 'feared that the statement would be interpreted as an indication that the Government intended to restrain movements to higher wages' but his considered reply was saved for the next meeting, on 3 January, when he said that the Chancellor's statement

must imply that workers should accept a decline in their standards of living during the war period. But he was sure that workers would repudiate leaders who asked them to do this. Moreover, the trade unions had at all times to counter definite opposition designed to discredit the existing trade union leadership in the eyes of trade union members. Having regard to past experience, it could be anticipated that there will be many occasions during the war in which there will be need for authoritative constitutional trade union leadership. . . . In these circumstances it was asking too much of the TUC to expect them to put forward a proposal which would not only be foredoomed to failure, but would be mischievously used in an attempt to overthrow trade union authority.

When Citrine finished, the employers' spokesman, Sir John Forbes Watson, said that the employers' side 'were in full agreement' with what Citrine had said about 'the maintenance of the constitutional authority of trade unions'. Similar views were being expressed within the government: 'January found the Economic Policy Committee submitting

<sup>4</sup> W. K. Hancock and M. M. Gowing, *British War Economy* (London, HMSO, 1949), 166-7.

a report to the War Cabinet on the possibility of stabilising the prices of staple commodities . . . but it would be unwise to attempt to secure in return an undertaking that wages would not be increased, since the trade union leaders could not guarantee fulfilment of the bargain'.<sup>5</sup> There was general agreement at an informal meeting of the trade union and employers' representatives on the National Joint Advisory Council on 31 January that there should be no attempt to restrain those wage increases that were due to increased prices, and that the government should be urged to maintain and extend price controls and subsidies; but Citrine had already won. Later that day the full council met to be told that the Chancellor was currently making a speech to the Commons which included the words: 'Our policy therefore is to continue, for a time at least, to make public money available, within such limits as prove possible, to hold retail prices of staple foods or at any rate to impose delay and check the abruptness of any rise'.<sup>6</sup> The speech 'created a deep impression. The Government had made its most significant contribution towards a level economy.'<sup>7</sup>

By this time there had already been a substantial increase in retail prices. The official cost-of-living index figure for January 1940 was 12 per cent higher than the September 1939 figure. Based on a survey of working-class expenditure conducted in 1913, this index was no longer an accurate measure of price movements. Some of the items included in the original survey no longer figured in household budgets and few of them were bought in the same proportion as in 1913. At the meeting of the National Joint Advisory Council on 1 November 1939, Citrine asked why the inquiry conducted by the Ministry of Labour in 1937 had not by now 'produced a better basis for the index'. He was told the reason was a shortage of 'tabulation machinery. Over a million cards have to be punched.' Nevertheless the experience of workers and housewives was that prices were rising and the index was the only measure of the change. Workers, many of whom remembered the rapid inflation experienced in the First World War,<sup>8</sup> demanded that their unions secure compensating wage increases, and claims were submitted.

Inevitably, the unions concerned with armaments, in which employment and production were rising fast, were among the first to make demands. The shipbuilding unions had submitted a claim before the outbreak of war which was settled at the end of September with an increase of 10p a week for time-workers and 4 per cent for piece-workers. At the beginning of December the Engineers and the Foundryworkers sought an increase of 50p a week from the engineering employers, while the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>6</sup> HC Debs., 24 Jan. 1940, col. 1159.

<sup>7</sup> Hancock and Gowing, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 147.

Unions asked them for an unspecified amount. Both claims were settled in February 1940 for an additional 25p on the national bonus. Not surprisingly, the shipbuilding unions were by now dissatisfied with their 10p increase. They submitted a new claim, also settled in February 1940, for a 25p 'war bonus' to be paid to both time-workers and piece-workers. There were two rates for women workers over the age of 18 in engineering, with a differential of 10p a week between them. Before the war began an agreement had been made to give all women engineering workers an increase of 5p a week in October, with a further increase of 10p a week to those on the lower rate in December, thus abolishing the differential. This was far from sufficient to compensate those who had been on the higher rate for the rise in prices since September, and in March 1940 the general unions submitted a claim for an increase of 50p a week for women over 18. The management board of the employers' association found this 'entirely unreasonable',<sup>9</sup> but on 27 May settled for 15p a week, with proportionate increases for girls below that age.

The steel industry was, of course, also vital in the production of munitions. Traditionally the wages of most steel workers had fluctuated with the price of steel, but after a time-lag. There had been a considerable drop in steel prices early in 1939 which

had its main impact on the scale of May 1939, when the sliding scale addition fell sharply. Wage rates, though possibly not earnings, would have remained below the 1938 level in the autumn of 1939 had the scale been adhered to. But steel prices were already being raised in response to the rising prices of imported material, and the cost of living was beginning to rise. The position was too paradoxical to be acceptable, or easily defended, and an 'anticipatory' addition of 10 per cent was agreed in November. A further 10 per cent rise occurred in the spring . . . and this now looked menacing to those who were trying to prevent steel prices rising too fast. . . . The Auditor General expressed a dislike for the traditional sliding scale . . . [and] a system which linked wages with the cost of living . . . was substituted for the historic scale.<sup>10</sup>

Seamen were even more vital to the war effort than munitions workers, for Britain could not survive without imports. At the outbreak of war the able seaman's wage was £9.625 a month, or approximately £2.90 a week. Even taking into account the board and accommodation provided at sea, this was not a generous wage for a man who could reasonably claim to be a skilled worker, and on 15 September 1939 the National Maritime Board added a 'war risk' allowance of £3 a month, an increase in pay of a little over 30 per cent. The author of the volume on *Merchant Shipping* in the official history of the Second World War was

<sup>9</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, *Management Board Minutes* (28 Mar. 1940).

<sup>10</sup> C. B. A. Behrens, *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War* (London, HMSO and Longmans, Green, 1955), 174, n. 1.



told that this description of the wage increase was chosen 'to prevent the increase in the A.B.'s wages, which were very low at the outbreak of war, from serving as a precedent to other industries'; and, given the casualties that were to be suffered by the merchant navy, it was justified.

The lower-paid railwaymen and footplate staff had secured wage increases just before the war.<sup>11</sup> During the war control of the railways was in the hands of a railway executive committee consisting of the general managers of the main-line companies and the vice-chairman of London Transport with Sir Ralph Wedgwood in the chair, but the machinery for wage negotiation was unchanged. A general increase of 20p was settled in February 1940. Pay increases were also agreed in road haulage, road passenger transport, and the docks.

In coalmining, where the government hoped for an increase in output, not only for war production, but also to increase exports so as to earn foreign currency, wages were still settled by district ascertainments, but the supporters of national wage bargaining on the executive of the Miners' Federation saw the war as an opportunity to gain their objective. They therefore approached the owners for a national increase to apply in every district. However, the terms of reference of the Joint Standing Consultative Committee, which was their channel for discussion with the owners, limited it to dealing with 'questions of common interest and general application in the industry, not excluding general principles applicable to the determination of wages by district agreements'. Did this cover national wage negotiations? After some hesitation, the owners accepted that the joint committee could deal with 'questions of a general character likely to arise from the war with power and authority to settle wherever possible'.<sup>12</sup> The Miners' executive decided that this formula allowed them to submit a claim for a general increase of 5p a shift for adult miners. The owners offered 2½p, and settled for a figure in old pence which amounts to a little over 3p. The executive had acted without the authority of the district unions, and several districts opposed the agreement, which was however approved at a national conference on 27 October, with Scotland, South Wales, and Yorkshire voting against. The executive next turned its attention to negotiating a formula for adjusting wages to any further movements in the cost-of-living index, and agreed with the owners on an additional 0.3p on wages for each increase of 1 point in the index. The agreement, which was 'to take account of the special conditions arising out of the war', provided that 'district wage arrangements' were to 'continue to operate during the war, subject to mutually agreed alterations'.<sup>13</sup> South Wales was the only major district to vote against it.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> Arnot, 288.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 295.

A number of industries already had agreements to adjust pay in step with changes in the cost-of-living index. One of these was construction, but its formula did not meet the needs of wartime. Adjustments were made only once a year, and did not provide full compensation for changes in the cost-of-living index. Labourers received smaller increases than craftsmen, which did not accord with the egalitarianism of other wartime wage agreements, most of which awarded the same money increase to skilled and unskilled workers alike. It was therefore agreed that adjustments should be at four-monthly intervals, with increases of 0.2p an hour for each change of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  points in the index for both craftsmen and labourers, which was slightly more generous than the old formula to craftsmen, and significantly more generous to labourers. The footwear industry provided that adjustments in wages should be made in any month in which the index altered sufficiently to warrant a change. For men the prescribed increases, at 15p for 10 points on the index, instead of 20p for 21 points, were distinctly more generous than their previous scale; and for women the change was even more generous, at 10p a week for 10 points instead of 10p for 21 points. Other industries besides coalmining that had not previously adjusted their wages by means of a cost-of-living sliding scale now adopted such an arrangement. They included the two main branches of the cotton industry: spinning (including the preparatory stages) and weaving. The agreements, with slight differences between them, were signed in October 1939.

Most trade boards raised their statutory wage rates at some time during the first eight months of the war, as did all the county agricultural wage committees. However, the government, which hoped for substantial increases in agricultural production to economize on imports, thought it unwise to rely on the county committees alone. In April 1940 it introduced an Agricultural Wages Bill to amend the 1924 Act by empowering the national Agricultural Wages Board to fix a national minimum wage for men. County committees would still be entitled to set a county wage higher than this minimum, but they would require special dispensation from the board to fix a lower minimum; and they were to 'have regard' to the national minimum for men when fixing wages for women and young persons. The bill became law in June.

The one major industry in which manual workers received no general wage increases until August 1940 was printing and paper. Demand fell off sharply following the declaration of war, and in anticipation of this change the major sections of the industry negotiated emergency agreements allowing short-time working, alterations in working hours, and transfers between offices in order to mitigate the consequential unemployment. Except for draughtsmen, before the war white-collar

workers in engineering and most other private industries were dependent on the goodwill of their employers to compensate them for rising prices. However, the National Union of Clerical and Administrative Workers had drawn up a salary age-scale in June 1939 which it had presented to engineering firms throughout the country, and in January 1940 it signed an agreement with the Manchester district engineering employers for a scale for clerks up to 18 years of age. A month later the management board of the Engineering Employers' Federation, while recognizing that annual salary reviews were 'entirely a matter for individual firms', felt that as the increase of 25p a week recently granted to manual workers had been entirely in recognition of the rising cost of living, that amount might not be enough for staff and decided 'on this occasion' to recommend 'sympathetic consideration' to federated firms.<sup>14</sup> In the retail trade, the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers made a significant step towards national negotiations in the co-operative sector when it negotiated its first war bonus of 20p a week for men and 12½p for women with the Co-operative Union. 'A large number of societies outside the Co-operative Union's Wages Board machinery agreed to be bound by the award, which thus covered the greater number of the Union's employees in retail Co-operative service.'<sup>15</sup>

In the public sector the National Association of Local Government Officers failed to secure a cost-of-living sliding-scale agreement from its National Whitley Council, but the employers were willing to recommend to local authorities the payment of a fixed bonus. The first of these bonuses came into effect on 1 April 1940. By August, only 240 out of 1,530 authorities in England and Wales were paying the recommended amounts, and another 339 (including twenty-eight in Scotland) were paying a lower war bonus.<sup>16</sup> Wages for manual local-authority employees were settled by their provincial councils, all of which negotiated increases during the first eight months of the war as did the national joint councils for gas and electricity supply which represented both local authority and private undertakings. In the Civil Service, the government rejected the first approach from the staff side of the National Whitley Council for a war bonus, but by May 1940 it was ready to negotiate. A bonus was agreed, but only for the lower grades of the service. Post Office staff, of course, were also covered by the agreement.

The other major industrial-relations issue, besides pay and prices, that demanded attention was the distribution of manpower. Two important aspects of this issue had already been settled. Conscription

<sup>14</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, *Management Board Minutes* (15 Feb. 1940).

<sup>15</sup> Richardson, 147.

<sup>16</sup> Spoor, 201.

provided for whatever intake was required for the armed services, and the Schedule of Reserved Occupations, which had been drawn up during the winter of 1938–9, prevented conscription from denuding industry of workers who were of greater value to the war effort in their civilian occupations than in the armed forces. There were, however, other requirements. The labour force of the munitions industries had to be expanded substantially, and in particular a remedy had to be found for the shortage of skilled munitions workers which was already making itself felt. The official historians of the war present the handling of these and related matters as a story of incompetence, indecision, and muddle until May 1940 when Bevin took over as Minister of Labour and National Service in Churchill's government, and a serious start was made to provide solutions to the country's manpower problems. There was, for example, a dispute between the production departments and the Ministry of Labour during the early months of the war over whether to take the work to the workers or vice versa. The production departments 'called upon the Ministry of Labour to institute a vigorous policy of transfer' of workers 'from region to region', whereas the Ministry of Labour wanted the production departments to locate their factories in areas where labour was surplus and to make 'all possible use of sub-contracting and contract-spreading'.<sup>17</sup>

The remedy for the shortage of skilled workers had to be found in 'dilution'—the concentration of skilled workers on those parts of their jobs that demanded a high degree of skill, and the transfer of their remaining tasks to less-skilled workers. This transfer entailed an agreement with the unions of skilled workers to 'relax' their 'customs' on what tasks were skilled. In April 1938 the Engineers had refused to enter into such an agreement with the Engineering Employers' Federation, but had signed one on 28 August 1939 and revised it on 9 September to apply to the conditions of war which had then been declared, but

the Ministry of Labour was cautious about taking positive steps to bring into active operation the agreement . . . It considered that, if any department had to thrust itself forward, it was the Ministry of Supply. But the Ministry of Supply refused to take the responsibility. The consequence was that until May 1940 no government authority had been found willing to shoulder the duty of administering a policy which the War Cabinet had explicitly adopted.<sup>18</sup>

Another issue was the poaching of skilled labour from one firm to another. On 21 September a Control of Engagement Act had given the Ministry of Labour power to prohibit employers from advertising for labour, and to prohibit them from engaging labour without the consent

<sup>17</sup> Hancock and Gowing, 146.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



of the employment exchanges. However, at the instigation of the unions, the Labour Party had secured an amendment to the bill to require the reference of the draft order to a representative committee of employers and trade-unionists in the industry concerned. In December the management board of the Engineering Employers' Federation considered several complaints of 'enticement'. It was told that the Act could not help them, since the unions were opposed to any order covering engineering. The only order issued under the Act was for the building industry, where there was fierce competition to attract labour to construct military camps at remote sites.

A general review of the manpower situation in the spring of 1940 is given by Inman in her volume on *Labour in the Munitions Industries*: 'Meanwhile a positive labour supply policy seemed as far away as ever. The great obstacle to any control over the movement of labour remained the opposition of the trade unions. . . . For the slow progress of dilution on the other hand, both sides of industry were responsible.'<sup>19</sup> This attribution of blame is unfair. So far as the control over the movement of labour is concerned, the primary fault was the government's in not persuading the House of Commons, where it had a commanding majority, to give them effective authority. As for dilution, Inman admits that the Ministry of Labour had since 1936 been telling the service ministries 'that if munitions contracts were better co-ordinated the competition for skilled labour would be reduced', a criticism which, she admits, 'had some justification'.<sup>20</sup> As for the blame to be attributed to employers and unions for the slow progress of dilution, it is by no means clear that both were equally at fault. For example, after a meeting with the Engineers' executive on 16 November 1939, the engineering employers' management board noted that progress with relaxation was 'somewhat slow', but the 'impression received at this meeting was that the AEU Executive have every intention of seeing that the Agreement is operated in a sensible manner'.<sup>21</sup> On 25 January 1940 the board again noted that the extent of application of the agreement was 'disappointing', but there was 'no evidence . . . that the Union was not anxious to see the Agreement operating successfully', and the trouble was 'a feeling of apathy on the part of the employers in certain districts'. No doubt one of the causes of 'apathy' among employers was the fear that their skilled workers would not welcome the introduction of dilutees, but, if they were not prepared to press ahead in the knowledge that the union executive would back them, dilution had no chance of making substantial progress.

<sup>19</sup> Inman, 38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, *Management Board Minutes* (17 Nov. 1939).

The truth is that the circumstances of the 'phoney' war did not encourage resolute action on manpower. Britain was not actively engaged in combat. There was no evidence of a general labour shortage. Unemployment figures showed their peacetime pattern of a steady rise through the autumn and into the new year. The number of men registered as unemployed climbed from 895,804 on 11 September 1939 to a peak of 1,146,390 on 12 February 1940; although unemployment among women fell by over 30,000 in the same period. Then in March the expansion of the munitions industries showed in a rapid drop in the unemployment figure for both sexes, with the figure for men below that for September 1939 for the first time.

However, there was one respect in which progress was made towards effective dilution of labour over these months. If the Engineers and other unions of skilled workers were willing to allow some of their traditional work to be done by less-skilled workers, those workers had to be found. If the dilutee was a less-skilled engineering worker, another worker would have to be found to perform the job he was vacating. With conscription to the forces and the rapid expansion of the munitions industries, male workers would soon be in short supply, and, in many instances, either the dilutee, or the replacement for a male dilutee, would have to be a woman. In either case, a woman would be employed to do a man's job, and before the unions would permit that, there would have to be an agreement on the terms of employment to be applied to the woman concerned. This agreement would have to be negotiated with those general unions that were recognized as representing the women, and, in so far as a woman would be doing any part of what was traditionally a skilled man's job, also with the skilled union concerned. On 17 November 1939 the engineering employers' management board reported four discussions with the general unions on this subject, and one with the Engineers. The discussions continued over the winter, leading to meetings with all three unions, and an agreement signed on 22 May 1940. It provided that 'women workers employed on work of a suitable character hitherto performed by adult male labour' were to serve three probationary periods, the first of eight weeks, and the second and third of twelve weeks each. During the first period a woman was to be paid the agreed women's rate; in the second her rate was to be increased by a third of the difference between that rate and the rate of the man she replaced; and in the third period she was to receive 75 per cent of the man's rate. Thereafter, a woman carrying out, 'without additional supervision and assistance, work hitherto recognised as work done by male labour' was to be paid the rate of the man she replaced. If that condition was not met, a rate was 'to be arranged according to the nature of the work performed and the ability displayed'. Similar

agreements were signed by several other skilled unions. One issue that had to be settled concerning male dilutees was the method of their selection. The general unions argued that the criterion should be seniority of service in the industry. The management board considered that would be 'too restrictive', but was prepared to assure the unions that its 'policy' was that its 'first loyalty is to the men who belong to the industry'.<sup>22</sup>

Some progress towards more effective utilization of manpower was therefore being made when Churchill replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister on 12 May 1940 with a coalition government which included Bevin as Minister of Labour and National Service, as the office was now called. On 22 May, the day on which the agreement for the extended employment of women in engineering was signed, Bevin met the National Joint Advisory Council to tell them that an Emergency Powers Bill was going through all its stages in the House of Commons on that day, and the first Defence Regulation under the Act, when passed (Order 58A) was to give him power 'to direct any person to perform any service of which he was capable under terms and conditions of service which he would be authorised to prescribe'. He was also to have powers to control business, and sole responsibility for labour supply. This new approach of the ministry to manpower matters had, however, been foreshadowed at an interdepartmental meeting on 8 May, before the fall of Chamberlain, when the service ministers, including Churchill, 'urged . . . the general supervision of the distribution and movement of manpower including the control of poaching and competitive bidding in the labour market'.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless Bevin did not want to put too much emphasis on compulsion. On 22 May 1940 he told the National Joint Advisory Council: 'We came to the conclusion that with the goodwill of the Trades Union Congress and the Unions and of the Employers' Federation, a little less democracy and a little more trust in these difficult times, we could maintain to a very large extent intact the peacetime arrangements, merely adapting them to suit these extraordinary circumstances.'

#### *General Pay Movements 1940-1945*

The main influence on pay movements in Britain up to the end of 1940 was increasing prices, assisted by the rapid fall in unemployment. Despite the policy of price stabilization adopted by the government in January, it was unable to avoid a considerable increase in the cost of

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* (5 Dec. 1939).

<sup>23</sup> H. M. D. Parker, *Manpower* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green, 1957) 95, 85.

living over the rest of the year. The index, which stood at 100 in September 1939 and rose to 112 in December, went up again to 126 by December 1940. Import prices continued to rise, and Britain had to subsidize imports by the sale of securities which were being rapidly exhausted by the end of 1940. Everything depended on the readiness of the United States to help, and the President, Franklin Roosevelt, could do little until he had secured his re-election, for the third time, in November 1940. In December he announced his proposals for Lend-Lease. In March 1941 the Lend-Lease Act was passed by Congress and the first appropriation under it was authorized. Britain's financial position was assured. The cost-of-living index rose by only 4 points in 1941, to 130. By December 1942 it had fallen by 1 point, to 129, and by December 1943 it was down a further point, to 128. Thereafter it rose again slightly, to 130 by December 1944, and 134 by July 1945.

The most important pay settlements, in terms of numbers affected, were those in the engineering industry. This had been true even before the war, but the size of the industry's labour force increased considerably during the war. By 1943 total employment in engineering, male and female, was about 50 per cent higher than in 1939. Given the continued rise in prices since the increase of 25p a week in the national bonus for men in February, it is not surprising that the unions submitted claims for a further wage increase in July 1940. The Engineers and the Foundryworkers proposed an additional 1¼p an hour, and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions asked for an increase of 50p a week. Their cases were heard in August, when the employers asked for an adjournment. The director of the Engineering Employers' Federation spoke to the management board of the 'desirability of the Government being called upon to take their full share in the responsibility of deciding on the policy to be adopted in relation to national wage claims'.<sup>24</sup> After further delay the board decided to recommend to its constituent associations that the claims be rejected, in order 'to force the Government to share the responsibility for whatever decision is ultimately reached'.<sup>25</sup> It pointed out that not only was the government the industry's chief customer, but the decision would automatically be applied in the Royal Ordnance Factories under the 'fair wage' policy for government employees.

At Bevin's request the meeting of the National Joint Advisory Council on 22 May had established a Joint Consultative Committee of seven from the General Council and seven from the British Employers' Confederation as a less unwieldy body than the full council to advise him

<sup>24</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, *Management Board Minutes* (29 Aug. 1940).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (7 Oct. 1940).



on 'all matters arising out of the legislation passed by Parliament'.<sup>26</sup> At its first meeting on 28 May, the committee was asked by Bevin 'to consider the best means of removing the general problems of wages from the field of controversy during the critical months ahead'.<sup>27</sup> The committee was not prepared to accept Bevin's suggestion of periodic reviews by a tribunal to adjust wages in all industries on a uniform basis akin to the Committee on Production in the First World War. Accordingly it met him again on 4 June with a unanimous proposal that there should be no interference with existing negotiating arrangements so long as they reached agreed decisions; but, if they failed to do so the dispute should be referred for arbitration to a tribunal whose awards would be legally binding on both sides, so that strikes and lockouts would be avoided. Its proposal was accepted and embodied in the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order (Order 1305) which took effect on 25 July. It established a National Arbitration Tribunal of five members, three of them, including the chairman, appointed by the minister, and the other two from representative panels of employers and trade-unionists—one from each panel. When a dispute had been referred to the minister and not settled by the existing machinery (or otherwise), he was to refer it within twenty-one days to the tribunal, whose award was to be binding. The order also prohibited strikes and lockouts except where the minister failed to refer the dispute to the tribunal within twenty-one days, and required all employers to observe 'recognised terms and conditions'.

The tribunal heard its first case—a general pay-claim in the printing industry—on 20 August. Thereafter it was kept busy for a time with a succession of mainly local disputes or disputes in individual firms. However, when the engineering employers followed the recommendation of their management board by rejecting the unions' claims, it was inevitable that this dispute should be referred to the tribunal which heard the case on 7-8 January 1941, and awarded an increase of 17½p a week on the national bonus. This increase, which amounted to roughly 4 per cent for a skilled man, and more for a labourer, by no means matched the rise in the cost of living since the increase negotiated with the employers in February 1940, so it was to be expected that the engineering unions would submit another claim before 1941 was over, although the increase in prices during that year was relatively modest. The different groups of unions submitted their various claims in July. On this occasion the two general unions submitted their own claim apart from the confederation. Noting that a series of increases in the national bonus had diminished the value of 'premium' payments for overtime,

<sup>26</sup> Parker, 96.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

weekend work, and piece-work, which were all related to the basic rate, they decided that it was time for an increase in their basic rate, and proposed that it should be raised by 45p a week, whereas the Engineers asked for 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ p an hour, and the confederation did not quantify their claim. The employers delayed a decision until October when a ballot of the local associations provided a majority of 99.2 per cent for rejecting the claims and leaving the decision to the National Arbitration Tribunal, which heard the submissions of the two sides in December and awarded a further increase of 25p on the national bonus. Since the increase in prices over the year had been no more than 4 points, this award went some way towards restoring the value of the engineering worker's wage after its fall in 1940.

When considering the value of wartime wages, it has to be remembered that rising output of munitions entailed overtime working and resulted in increased earnings under systems of payment by results, both of which yielded additional earnings over and above increases in rates of pay negotiated with employers or awarded by the tribunal. Over the war years average earnings of adult male wage-earners in Britain rose by 76 per cent compared with an increase of 53 per cent in the official index of wage rates. However, it must also be remembered that these additional earnings were unevenly distributed among the workforce. Generally speaking piece-workers did well; and a man on time-rates with little opportunity to work overtime probably received little or no increase in his real earnings. Another relevant consideration is the basis of the cost of living in a 1914 survey of working-class expenditure. The movements of the index did not necessarily represent the experience of the majority of housewives during 1939-45. In 1942 the government decided not to subsidize coal prices to offset an increase in miners' pay, but 'to apply a subsidy . . . to another commodity entering prominently into the cost of living. It selected sugar which was one of the most overweighted items in the official index'.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore it is necessary to remember that the rates of taxation were raised steeply during the war: 'Direct taxation had been increased up to the limits beyond which incentives to all-out production might be stifled, or hardship in individual cases become intolerable; indirect taxation on all but the essentials of life had mopped up more purchasing power'.<sup>29</sup> Rising wages had brought many wage-earners within the scope of income tax, which was deducted from their weekly-wage packet under the 'pay-as-you-earn' scheme. Consequently negotiated or arbitrated increases in rates of pay did not bring equivalent increases in take-home pay.

<sup>28</sup> Parker, 432.

<sup>29</sup> Hancock and Gowing, 501.

By the time the engineering unions submitted their next pay-claim, their unity in the Engineering Joint Trades Movement had been restored, so that a single claim was put to the employers; and the craft unions had agreed with the general unions that there must be some increase in base rates. They proposed that this should be  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. In addition they wanted an all-round increase of 55p in the national bonus, and a restoration of the pre-1931 conditions, which would involve, among other things, an increase from 25 per cent to  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent in piece-work times and prices. The employers' Management Board pondered its reply on 17 December 1942. It agreed that something should be done for the 'plain time workers' and proposed an increase of 25p a week. It proposed that the question of an increase in base rates should be met by transferring £1 from the national bonus to the base rates of the various grades of worker, but was not prepared to restore pre-1931 conditions,<sup>30</sup> and decided that piece-workers should have no increase in their earnings as a result of the agreement except where they were unable to earn 25 per cent above the new base rate. 'The great difficulty in the transference of part of the bonus to the base rate was the consequential adjustments necessary in piecework prices and times, but it might be possible to compensate the pieceworker . . . without adjustments of prices by adding a sum or percentage to his earnings.'<sup>31</sup>

At the end of January 1943 the unions put forward a new proposal, limiting their claim to the transfer of £1 from the national bonus to the base rate, with an increase of 30p for plain time-workers, and no restoration of conditions except for the increase in times and prices from 25 per cent to  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. The Management Board decided to put its proposal to its members along with their own, and a compromise 'which might involve an alternative percentage for pieceworkers'. The outcome was decisive on three issues. The board's proposal was rejected by 91.4 per cent to 8.6 per cent; 98.1 per cent of the votes supported an increase of 30p instead of 25p for plain time-workers; and 78.7 per cent rejected  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent as the basis for piece-work times and prices. By contrast, the votes on a piece-work compromise could hardly have been more evenly split; 50.1 per cent were in favour and 49.9 per cent were against. In these circumstances its negotiating committee met the unions on 18 February to raise its offer for plain time-workers to 30p. It was rejected, but Tanner 'conveyed the impression that he was not anxious to close the door'.<sup>32</sup> However, the Management Board decided that unless the unions came forward with a proposal that did not involve a general

<sup>30</sup> See Clegg *History*, ii. 495-6.

<sup>31</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (17 Dec. 1942).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* (25 Feb. 1943).

increase in piece-work times and prices, it would have to 'fail to agree'. The unions made no such proposal, and submitted their original claim to the National Arbitration Tribunal on 18 March 1943. The award (No. 326) was issued two days later: £1 was to be transferred from the national bonus to base rates; plain time-workers were to have an increase of 30p in their national bonus; and the percentage for calculating piece-workers' times and prices was to be raised from 25 to 27.5. The employers made it clear to the tribunal that the award 'involved a great many problems which could only be solved by mutual co-operation and goodwill' and that 'the Tribunal might have to be asked to give certain interpretations'.<sup>33</sup> They were proved right soon enough.

The industry's negotiators made no further attempts during the war to reform the wage structure. In January 1944 the unions applied for an increase of 50p a week on the national bonus for both time-workers and piece-workers. The Management Board was for rejecting the claim so that the decision would be left to the tribunal, but they made no recommendation. They did not need to; for in March their members took the same view by 99.63 per cent to 0.37 per cent. This decision was reported to the unions at a conference in April; they reported a dispute to the ministry; and the tribunal heard the case in May. It awarded a general increase of 20p on the national bonus. When the unions gave notice of another claim in September the Management Board was told:

It was the feeling of the Policy Committee that it would not be to the advantage of the Federation to hasten negotiations on this application. Redundancy . . . would be likely to increase . . . with the result that there might be a marked change in the situation by the time the Federation was due to give its reply or by the time the question reached the National Arbitration Tribunal.<sup>34</sup>

No one hurried. In January 1945 the Engineering Joint Trades Movement defined its claim as for a 'substantial increase'. In February the management board put the claim to its associations, which in March voted almost unanimously to reject it, and in April the tribunal awarded a general increase of 22½p on the national bonus.

Over the war years the weekly pay of men in the engineering industry (base rate plus national bonus) had increased by £1.40 for time-workers, and by £1.10 for piece-workers. Even neglecting the adjustments to the pay of women on women's work in engineering during the early months of the war (and agreed before the war), such women received pay increases of almost the same amount as those of the men. Their weekly pay (base rate plus national bonus) rose by £1.30 for time-workers, and by £1.05 for piece-workers. Given the wide margin between men's pay

<sup>33</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (25 Mar. 1943).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* (26 Oct. 1944).



and women's pay at the outset, the proportional increase for women was of course far larger than that for the men, and accomplished with far less dissension. The adjustments to the women's wage structure were also similar to those of men. The women's national bonus was increased by more for time-workers than for piece-workers, and in August 1944, following Award 326 for the men, 60p of the women's national bonus was transferred to the base rate for both time-workers and piece-workers. Only one of the women's wage-claims was settled by the National Arbitration Tribunal, in 1941, whereas all the men's claims from 1941 onwards went to the tribunal.

Shipbuilding wage increases for time-workers were settled for the same amount on the national bonus as engineering wage increases, and in most years at the same time or shortly afterwards. The only occasion when the two industries got out of step was in the winter of 1942-3, when the shipbuilding claim did not include a revision in its wage structure. The National Arbitration Tribunal awarded it an increase of 30p on its national bonus in December 1942 whereas the more complex engineering claim had to wait for Award 326 in March 1943. A succession of wage increases, some of them negotiated with the Railway Executive Committee and others awarded by the Railway Staff National Tribunal, brought railwaymen a slightly smaller overall increase in basic rates during the war years than those of engineering time-workers, but a little more than for engineering piece-workers. The figure on the railways was £1.27½p, paid as a standard war wage applying to all adult male operating staff. Road-transport workers received rather smaller increases. The decisions of the Road Haulage Wages Board gave different amounts to different classes of worker, and overall the amounts varied from 97½p to £1.12½p. Municipal road-passenger-transport workers received an overall increase of £1.02½p. Dockers were granted only three increases of 5p a day, or 90p a week altogether, but were compensated by a further massive increase of 15p a day in November 1945.

Many industries relied on a cost-of-living sliding scale for their pay increases. These included the building industry, the footwear industry, and textile-finishing, which already had such scales at the beginning of the war, along with steel, coalmining, wool, and both sections of the cotton industry which introduced their scales in response to the price increases of 1939-40. These scales served tolerably well into 1941, but from 1942 onwards the index was almost stable, with small movements up and down. On occasion the latter brought pay reductions at a time when other industries were negotiating pay increases. For instance the footwear scale brought a reduction of 15p a week for men and 10p a week for women in 1942 which was eliminated later in the year by a

small upward movement in the index. The reaction of the negotiators to this situation varied from industry to industry. The employers and unions in the building industry negotiated straight pay increases of 20p a week for craftsmen and 15p for labourers in each year from 1943 to 1945, which gave craftsmen a total increase of £1.30 over the war years, just 10p less than time-working engineering craftsmen. The footwear industry had no general increase in pay in 1943, but in January 1944 an increase of 20p was negotiated for both men and women, and in September an upward movement in the index brought a further 15p for men and 10p for women. Steel workers had already received two pay increases of 10 per cent each before they introduced their cost-of-living sliding scale in 1940. Disappointed with the small increase that it had given them in 1941, they persuaded the employers to revise the formula to yield an increase of 5p a shift in 1942, but the following year this revised scale yielded a small pay cut, so they adjusted it again in 1944 to provide a further increase, and in 1945 the adjusted scale itself produced a further small increase. From 1942 onwards both sections of the cotton industry and wool and textile-finishing abandoned their sliding scales and negotiated straight wage increases. In 1944 and 1945 the two sections of the cotton industry came together to negotiate uniform wage increases to apply to both spinning and weaving.

So far the list of industries includes only those whose wage movements for men were roughly in step over the war period, although these were obtained through a wide range of agreements and arrangements. There were three other industries in which wage-earners fared substantially better than average: agriculture, marine transport, and coalmining. At the end of August 1939 the average weekly wage of male farmworkers was £1.74. The national minimum wage introduced in 1940 was £2.40, raised to £3 in 1941, to £3.25 in 1943, and to £3.50 in 1945. The overall increase of £1.76 was substantially above that in any other industry mentioned so far, and the comparative increase far greater. The wage rate of the agricultural worker doubled over the war years whereas the index of weekly wage rates for all industries rose by 50 per cent. Even more dramatically, in another instance of high wartime demand for labour, the merchant navy's war-risk bonus of £3 a month agreed in September 1939 was followed by further pay increases each year to 1943, by which time the total monthly pay stood at £24, of which £10 was war-risk bonus, and the total increase since August 1939 was £13.76, an increase of approximately 143 per cent.

These two industries were clearly exceptional cases. To avoid defeat by starvation the country needed to raise agricultural production to the highest possible level by increasing the acreage under the plough. This could not be done without maintaining the agricultural labour force at

something like its pre-war level. The place of farmworkers conscripted into the services could be taken by land-girls, but the risk was that, with a general labour shortage, and high earnings in the munitions industries, farmworkers would leave their jobs for other industries in disastrously high numbers if their wages were not increased to something approaching the level of urban pay. However, even their efforts would be insufficient to feed the nation without food imports from abroad brought in by the merchant navy; and the rearmament programme would have ground to a halt without imports of raw materials, mainly steel and oil. In addition, the job of the merchant seamen was only slightly less dangerous than that of the flying crews in bomber command. 'Just over 7,000 men had been killed by enemy action in 1941; nearly 8,000 were killed in 1942. . . . [It is] not unlikely that a quarter of the men who were in the Merchant Navy on the outbreak of war, and perhaps a higher proportion, did not survive until the end, or, if they survived, live permanently damaged lives.'<sup>35</sup> Merchant seamen were brave men and many of them were devoted to their calling, but it was evident that their number could not be sustained in circumstances such as these if their pay had remained at its pre-war level in relation to wages elsewhere. It is significant that there were no further advances in their pay after 1943, when the number of sinkings by U-boats began to fall off sharply.

Coalminers could claim that their work was as essential as that of agricultural workers and merchant seamen. Coal was the country's main fuel, necessary for the production of steel and of munitions, and to both the civilian population and the services. The miners had been relatively badly paid since the slump that followed the First World War. In 1936 public sympathy with the miners on this score had been sufficient to persuade many major companies to volunteer to pay more for their coal provided the proceeds were used to increase miners' pay.<sup>36</sup> This action, however, had not improved the miners' relative position in the earnings league. It had only prevented them from falling further behind. Certainly the miner's job was not as dangerous as that of a merchant seaman in wartime, but it was dangerous and dirty, and the physical conditions underground were, in many instances, unpleasant and uncomfortable. Despite all these considerations, the government did not accept the need for a substantial improvement in the miners' pay akin to those of agricultural workers and merchant seamen until 1942, and then only after the miners had made their discontent with existing circumstances very apparent.

One reason for its failure to appreciate the problem of miners' pay was that the risk of a shortfall in the output of coal became apparent only

<sup>35</sup> Behrens, 172.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 1.



in the winter of 1941-2. There had been a coal crisis in the hard first winter of the war, but that had been a crisis of distribution, with many roads and railway lines impassable. Output held up well in 1940, and the fall of France brought a bonus, for France had been in part dependent on coal imports from Britain which then ceased. However, 80,000 miners joined the forces between July 1939 and July 1941, the month after the Essential Work Order was applied to the industry, and, before that was done, many more miners also left for jobs in the munitions industries, an outflow that was only partially restrained by the application of the Restriction of Engagements Order in June 1940.<sup>37</sup> Those who left, especially those who went to the services, were mainly younger men, so that the quality of the mining labour force also suffered. Neither the numbers nor the quality was restored by the 40,000 or so recruits to the industry from outside, for there were not enough of them, and they lacked the experience and the hardened muscles.<sup>38</sup> Between 1939 and 1941 manpower fell by 9 per cent and production by 12 per cent.

Another reason for failure to appreciate that there was a problem of pay in coalmining was that there seemed to be adequate provision to maintain or even increase miners' pay. Their cost-of-living agreement continued to bring them wage increases up to July 1941. In 1940 the problem of absenteeism began to cause concern and an attendance bonus of 5p a shift for adult miners and 2½p for boys was agreed. Because of arguments over entitlement, it was later converted into a straight addition to the pay-packet. In addition the district agreements relating pay to proceeds continued to operate. They might have been expected to bring higher earnings under wartime conditions, but in fact costs rose to keep pace with prices, and net proceeds began to show a tendency to fall. Altogether the average weekly earnings of adult coalminers rose by approximately 50 per cent between 1938 and the March quarter of 1942, whereas the increase in average earnings of adult male wage-earners as a whole from October 1938 to January 1942 was 48 per cent.<sup>39</sup>

In April 1942 the Lord President's Committee reported to the War Cabinet on the 'impending coal crisis'. As a result the Cabinet appointed another committee under the chairmanship of the Lord President to tell them what should be done. The main proposal was that the government should take operational control of the industry, as they had done in 1916. This was done through a new Ministry of Fuel and Power. This

<sup>37</sup> W. H. B. Court, *Coal* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green, 1951), 116.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 123.

<sup>39</sup> The figures for miners' earnings are from Court, 221. Those for all industries are the Ministry of Labour's.



department took over the Mines Department and some of the functions of the Board of Trade. In addition the committee recommended that the government should discuss with the industry the establishment of permanent machinery for dealing with hours and wages by a national body which should not be part of the machinery of control. For this purpose the government set up a board of inquiry, chaired by the Master of the Rolls, Lord Greene, whose discharge of this duty was delayed while it dealt first with the immediate wage issue. The Miners' Federation had claimed wage increases of 20p a shift for all miners aged 18 and over and 10p a shift for boys; along with a national minimum wage of £4.25 for all miners aged 18 and over. The owners considered that any increase in pay should be related to attendance and output. However, both sides accepted that their differences should be decided by the Greene board, and that any increase should apply from 1 June 1942.

In its report the board agreed with the Miners' Federation that there should be a uniform national minimum wage, and came close to accepting the union's figure so far as adult underground workers were concerned, which it put at £4.15. For adult surface workers it put the minimum at £3.90. It also agreed with the union that there should be an immediate flat-rate addition to pay, but here the difference in figures was wider. It recommended 12½p a shift for all underground workers aged 18 and over. There were to be graduated increases for younger underground and surface workers. These increases were not to be affected by any adverse movement in the net proceeds of the industry under the district ascertainment schemes. The board also accepted the owners' proposal that there should be an output bonus, to be paid on a sliding scale for any increase in production beyond a given standard. It preferred that output be assessed pit by pit, in order to have a direct effect on the miners who worked there; but both the owners and the Miners' Federation wanted a district scheme to average out any chance factors affecting output in individual pits. The board therefore reluctantly accepted a district scheme, which went into operation in September 1942; but when it reviewed it a year later it judged that it had failed. Bonus had been earned in a fair number of the twenty-five districts into which the pits had been grouped for the scheme in the remainder of 1942, but thereafter in only a few of them. Discussion began on the possibility of a pit scheme, which was now favoured by the union, but before a decision had been taken the industry became involved in a new conflict over wages.

The second task of the Greene board had been to recommend national negotiating machinery for the industry to replace the Joint Standing Consultative Committee. It held that machinery was required

at three levels: national, district, and pit. At the first, it recommended a negotiating committee of equal numbers from each side, with a national tribunal of three members from outside the industry to which issues that the parties had failed to settle could be referred. At district level there were to be negotiating committees with appeal to a single referee, and the overhaul of pit conciliation machinery was left to the parties. The National Reference Tribunal, as it was called, consisted of Lord Porter as chairman along with two distinguished academics.

However, the new Ministry of Fuel and Power failed to halt the decline in coal output. Reduced output had led to a cut in the domestic coal ration, and the prospect was of a further decline. The minister wanted to improve the machinery of control. The Miners' Federation renewed its proposal for the nationalization of the mines. There was a debate in the Commons on 12–13 October 1943 in which Churchill laid down the guiding principle of the coalition government: 'everything for the war, whether controversial or not, and nothing controversial that is not bona fide needed for the war'<sup>40</sup>—ruling out immediate nationalization, but confirming the minister's promise that the coal control would remain after the war until Parliament had decided the future of the industry. Meanwhile there were signs of renewed industrial unrest in the mines. The federation complained of the unsatisfactory working of the pit committees, safety in the pits, the first award of the Porter tribunal which, it held, had fixed the wages of juveniles too low; and it believed that the comparison between miners' pay and pay in other industries was still unsatisfactory. To remedy it, the federation claimed a national minimum of £6 a week underground and £5.50 on the surface. On 28 October 1943 it asked the minister for an assurance that any award of the tribunal on this claim would be met by an increase in the price of coal, which he refused. Nevertheless the claim went to the tribunal, which on 22 January 1944 awarded an adult minimum rate of £5 underground and £4.50 on the surface, which became known as the 'Porter award'. It led to the greatest outbreak of industrial unrest of the war years in the coalfields, and especially in the low-paid coalfields of South Wales, Scotland, and the North-east.

The problem was that, like the Greene award, the Porter award made no provision for increasing actual rates of pay unless they were overtaken by the minimum rates, or for increasing the earnings of piece-workers unless these earnings failed to reach the new minimum rates. At the time of the Greene award the earnings of the higher-paid miners had generally been far enough ahead of the new minimum rates to allow the agreement to be accepted without too much ill-feeling and trouble, but

<sup>40</sup> HC Debs. (13 Oct. 1943), col. 924.

now that was no longer true, at least in the relatively low-paid coalfields. There the differentials of the piece-workers and the craftsmen were, in many instances, wiped out. The Porter tribunal, which had rejected the union's claim for a general revision of piece-work rates to preserve the piece-workers' differentials, had nevertheless recognized that there was a problem, and expressed the hope that the award might allow time for a general review of the industry's pay structure which it held was overdue. It had clearly miscalculated the urgency of such a review.

The national negotiating committee met to consider what should be done. It decided that no national formula could be found to resolve the problem, and that the districts should devise their own solutions. Some of them had already begun to do so. The committee also decided to ask the government whether it would raise coal prices to cover the cost of the decisions made in these district negotiations, as well as of the increases in the minimum rates awarded by the tribunal. On 4 February 1944 the minister refused to give such an assurance in advance. District negotiations went ahead. It was rumoured that South Wales was proposing to raise piece-rates by 15 per cent. The high-earning Yorkshire and Midlands districts, which 'had been disposed to accept the award as it stood',<sup>41</sup> changed their minds and began their own negotiations. The government decided that it must intervene. On 11 February the Minister of Fuel and Power, Gwyllim Lloyd George, issued a press statement to say that the Coal Charges Account would meet the cost of the Porter award, and of two other awards recently issued by the tribunal, on holiday pay and on pay for overtime and weekend work, but not 'the cost of any adjustments other than those necessary to pay for the most obvious anomalies arising out of the awards'.<sup>42</sup> The district negotiations were therefore thrown into disarray. The Durham Miners' executive wired a protest to the minister that day, and on 12 February the Durham County Federation Board, which included the representatives of the mechanics and enginemen, resolved that 'no organisation can take responsibility for circumstances that will inevitably arise where piece workers' earnings and the rates of skilled craftsmen approximate to those of the day and unskilled men'.<sup>43</sup> The subsequent unofficial strikes, which spread to all the low-paid coalfields and Yorkshire, caused the highest loss of working days of any wartime strike;<sup>44</sup> and to the loss

<sup>41</sup> Court, 257.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 258.

<sup>43</sup> W. R. Garside, *The Durham Miners 1919-1960* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 370.

<sup>44</sup> The *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (May 1945) records 850,000 working days as between Jan. and Mar. in various coalfields by strikes against the award, and 1 million working days lost in Yorkshire in Mar. and Apr. by a strike against the decision to include an allowance of 17½p for home coal in the minimum wage payable under the award. The two causes have so much in common that it seems reasonable to treat them as one; otherwise they would rank as the two largest strikes of the war.



of output which resulted from these stoppages must be added the deliberate limitation of output by many piece-workers who stayed at work.

Something had to be done, and it was up to the government to do it. Having drawn up proposals which were approved by the War Cabinet, the minister chaired a meeting of both sides on 8 March 1944 where they were considered. Further meetings were held and the parties, especially the Miners, had to consult their constituents. It was therefore not until 20 April that an agreement was signed accepting the minister's proposals. The main item was to add together the flat-rate additions to the miners' wage which had been made by national agreements, including the 5p a shift granted in 1936, but excluding the cost-of-living additions which totalled approximately 13½p, and to transfer the total, so far as the piece-worker was concerned, to his piece-rates. The amount transferred was 22½p a shift, or £1.35 for the piece-worker who worked six shifts in the week; and the transfer was accomplished by making an appropriate percentage increase in the tonnage or yardage piece-rates in each district. Time-workers, of course, continued to receive the 22½p a shift as part of their wages.

Provided that the adjustment of rates was carried out conscientiously in the districts, the piece-worker would earn no more than before for a given output, but if his output increased, the increase would bring him a larger increment in pay than he would have received for the same increase in output before the agreement. It should follow that any allowance in terms of output or yardage granted to a miner for working in an awkward place or unusually unpleasant conditions would also be worth more than it would have been before the agreement. Otherwise nothing was done towards the general overhaul of the wage structure in the industry which the tribunal had hoped for, and in particular nothing was done for the craftsmen whose differentials had been eroded. Other items in the agreement were that it should last for four years, well beyond the expected duration of the war; that the district ascertainment agreements should be suspended for that period, that the district output bonus arising from the Greene award should be discontinued and not be replaced by a pit scheme; and that neither side should seek a further change in wages at district or national level during the currency of the agreement.

Coal output continued to fall until the end of the war, although it is possible that it would have fallen further without the revision of piece-work payments; but the agreement had brought peace to the industry.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> One notable scheme intended to boost coal output was the employment of 'Bevin boys', selected by ballot from among young men due for national service, and sent to train for work in the



There were no further pay-claims or major disputes in 1944, and only one substantial stoppage in the industry in 1945. That was in March, and the strikers were craftsmen—16,000 firemen, deputies, and shot-firers in Scotland whose stoppage, for a wage increase, brought the loss of 180,000 working days. Given the neglect of the craftsmen's grievances by the agreement, it is perhaps surprising that they did not strike in other districts as well.

As for other industries, the workers in the printing industry might claim to have been treated harshly over their pay. Printing employees had to wait until 13 August 1940 for their first award of the National Arbitration Tribunal. The claim was for an increase of 50p a week for men and 37½p for women. The award gave 25p to men and 12½p to women. 'The employers were pleased with the verdict; union members were dismayed. At the time of the hearing the cost-of-living index was . . . 18 per cent above September 1939. The Award represented an increase of about 6 per cent for London craftsmen.'<sup>46</sup> The claim had been presented on behalf of all the unions by the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation. In July 1941, with the index at 28 per cent above that of August 1939, the federation decided to ask for another increase. In deference to the widespread wartime opinion that increases in prices hit the worst-paid hardest, it proposed an increase of 70p a week for those paid less than £3 with graduated increases down to 30p for those paid over £4.50. In September the employers offered a general increase of 25p for men and 12½p for women, 'on condition that any merit money could, at the employer's option, be absorbed in the increase, and that employers should have the option of requiring not more than five hours of regular overtime per week'.<sup>47</sup> Despite the opposition of some of the craft unions, the offer was accepted, with the proviso that the unions could not compel their members to work overtime.

Early in 1942 several of the unions made separate approaches to the employers for a revision of the grading system which allotted towns to one of six grades and provided a different rate of pay for each grade. The employers agreed to talk but only with the federation, so that any agreement would be accepted by all the unions. The outcome was a reduction in the number of grades from six to four, and an increase in pay of 37½p for men who had formerly been classed in the lowest grade, falling to an increase of 7½p for men who had previously been in the highest grade. For women increases ranged between 20p and 5p. In

pits. It was intended to provide 50,000 recruits, but it was 'highly unpopular among young men', and only 'a little over 20,000 in all were forthcoming'. Most of them did not work at the coal-face, but on other underground jobs, 'so freeing . . . other workers, more experienced in the ways of the mine . . . for upgrading to the coal-face' (Court, 304-6).

<sup>46</sup> Child, 291.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 292.

1943 the federation put in a claim for a general increase of £1 a week for both men and women. Since the case could not be supported by a rise in the cost-of-living index, the unions argued that wage rates in other industries were rising faster than those in the printing industry. The employers rejected the claim. The federation submitted it to the National Arbitration Tribunal, where the employers argued that it was inflationary and against the national interest and the interests of the industry. The tribunal also turned it down, except for awarding an increase of 20p to women who were not doing men's work. Women on men's work were paid men's rates.

The unions and their members were incensed, and their leaders were able to leave the next move to their branches and chapels, which inundated the employers with local wage-claims, in many instances backed with threats of overtime bans. Some bans were instituted, notably in Scotland where the Scottish Typographical Association imposed an official overtime ban. The employers, and the tribunal, had evidently miscalculated the feeling among printing workers; and, to avoid a breakdown of the system of national bargaining, they reopened negotiations, on condition that all 'aggressive or coercive actions' should cease. Agreement was reached on an increase of 37½p for men, and a further 12½p for women. The agreement also ruled out any further negotiated increases for the duration of the war and for twelve months thereafter, so long as the cost-of-living index remained reasonably stable.

Overall the pay increases for men in the printing industry in towns that were classified in the highest-paid grade at the outset of the war totalled 95p, and for the relatively small number of men in towns then classified grade 6 the figure was £1.25p. The first of these figures is well below the increases paid to men in most other industries during the war; and, given that printing wages were well above those in other industries at the outset, the relative decline in the pay of the printer in a grade 1 town was even sharper than these figures indicate. Moreover, the printing unions had to work harder than most other unions in wartime to achieve even this improvement in the pay of their members. The highest-paid workers of all in the industry, however, did better than the rest. They were the London newspapermen, who secured an increase of 37½p in 1941 compared with 25p for the men in the other branches of the industry; and in 1943 their increases varied from 50p to 75p, compared with 37½p elsewhere.

Manual workers in most industries not so far mentioned secured fairly regular wartime increases in their pay through their negotiating bodies or trade boards; as did distributive workers employed by co-operative societies. Other white-collar workers in private employment

were dependent on the goodwill of their employers for their pay increases, but this dependence decreased during the war years, especially in engineering, the manufacturing industry that employed far more white-collar workers than any other. The Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union had been recognized by the Engineering Employers' Federation since 1920, and the Draughtsmen's Association and the Association of Scientific Workers since 1924, for the purpose of making use of the engineering procedure to settle any disputes that they might have with federated firms; but this recognition had not entitled them to negotiate with the federation over the pay of their members. During the war procedural recognition was extended to the clerical section of the Transport and General Workers' Union, the National Association of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs, the Association of Scientific Workers, and also to the Association of Supervisory Staffs and Engineering Technicians, but on similarly restrictive terms. In fact the terms for the last-mentioned union were even more restrictive. It had originally been the National Foremen's Association, and the Engineering Employers' Federation, which supported the Foremen and Staff Mutual Benefit Society as a more appropriate means of promoting the interests of foremen than a trade union, had shown a special reluctance to grant recognition to them, which was overcome, at the suggestion of Citrine,<sup>48</sup> by recognizing the union to represent its members only in those firms where these constituted a majority of the grades for which the union catered.

Nevertheless, the employers' federation began to take the view that engineering firms needed some guidance on staff salaries during wartime, recommending 'sympathetic consideration' of staff salary increases to them in January 1940.<sup>49</sup>

Following the award of an increase of 17½p a week in the national bonus to manual workers a year later, the Clerical and Administrative Workers submitted a pay-claim. The Management Board once more decided that this was a matter for firms to handle, but also agreed that its director should have 'exploratory discussions' with the union's general secretary.<sup>50</sup> The union put forward claims to several local associations including Manchester, which already had an agreed graduated salary scale for junior staff, and when they were rejected reported disputes to the Ministry of Labour under Order 1305. The board was anxious to avoid arbitration. The main questions at issue were payment for overtime and a graduated salary scale for junior clerical staff. As the Manchester district was the major district concerned, the board agreed

<sup>48</sup> Bain, 171.

<sup>49</sup> In 1942 the board offered clerical staff the same bonus as manual workers.

<sup>50</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (27 Feb. 1941).



to accept a settlement there as a guide for the other eight districts concerned, so long as Manchester did not go beyond their 'mutual recommendation'; and added that the decision was 'liable to have repercussions generally'.<sup>51</sup> It was right. In September the employers' conference committee had to accept that the Manchester agreement should be extended to Preston, otherwise the claim would have been sent to the National Arbitration Tribunal.

At the beginning of 1942 the union proposed that all federated firms should raise their 'war allowance' to adult male clerical staff to 75p a week; and the Draughtsmen asked for £1, with 50p for women tracers. The board decided that it must find out what its members were paying. Such information would be 'essential' if the claims went to arbitration.<sup>52</sup> It conducted a referendum on what course of action it should take. The result was a majority of over 80 per cent against negotiating pay for adult staff either nationally or in the districts, but there was only a tiny majority against authorizing the federation to negotiate war bonuses. If there were to be negotiations, these should be only up to a certain limit, and the most popular figure was the limit for national insurance purposes: £240 a year. The board appointed a staff committee to deal 'in an advisory capacity' with 'staff workpeople';<sup>53</sup> and at its next meeting approved the committee's recommendation that the war bonus for male staff over 21 should be no less than 67½p (at which the war increase for male manual workers then stood); and, for women over 21, 47½p. It was not prepared to go above that figure for draughtsmen, whose claim was rejected. The Draughtsmen's Association advised its members to submit the claim to their firms.<sup>54</sup>

These developments had taken the federation a long way from its original position that staff salaries were entirely a matter for individual firms, and the Management Board considered how to regularize its intervention. On the recommendation of its staff committee, it suggested that member associations consider setting up their own staff committees, which should refer any question on which a decision might prejudice other districts to the federation. Where the board wanted to consult the associations, its opinions should be weighted by the numbers of staff affected by the issue in question. The same meeting considered a complaint from the London district that two member firms had disregarded the federation's recommendations on staff matters, and a request for a direction as to how to deal with them. The board 'felt that if member firms could not be relied upon to give effect to recommendations of the Management Board, then it would be essential for the

<sup>51</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (26 June 1941).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* (30 Apr. 1942).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* (29 Jan. 1942).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* (28 May 1942).



Federation to make agreements with Unions'.<sup>55</sup> On 31 May 1945 the Management Board accepted a recommendation from its staff committee that, following the recent award by the National Arbitration Tribunal to adult male manual engineering workers of an increase of 22½p a week, staff salaries should be increased for males by 5p a week at 15 years of age rising to 22½p at 21 years, and that this would make an inclusive scale at 21 years of age of £4.22½; with a scale for women rising to £3.07½ at 21. The federation was, therefore, now settling national salary scales. The final move to national negotiations over staff salaries came just after the end of the war. Following a conference with the Clerical and Administrative Workers and the Draughtsmen, the Management Board decided to approach the associations for authority to negotiate with appropriate unions on staff questions. It had 'in mind' the Wages Council Act of 1945 which provided for the establishment of statutory wages councils, including independent members, where 'no adequate machinery exists for the effective regulation of remuneration'.<sup>56</sup> The following month it heard that the associations had voted by a majority of 87.5 per cent in favour of authorizing the board to negotiate on staff matters 'without restriction', but subject to exercising discretion to protect the interests of federated firms, and to consultation where necessary.<sup>57</sup>

The salaries of adult male staff in engineering therefore rose by at least the same amount as the wages of manual workers over the war years. More detailed information is available for draughtsmen in their union's records of the average wages paid to draughtsmen aged 21-22. In 1939 the figure was £3.34, and £5.20 in 1945, an increase of over 58 per cent. These figures may not be precisely comparable with the wage rates of the engineering craftsmen which rose from £3.40 to £4.80 over the war years, but they indicate an increase of the same order of magnitude. For all those over 30 years of age the average wage was £5.69 in 1939 and £7.90 in 1945, showing an increase of 39 per cent, considerably less than for their junior colleagues—another example of wartime egalitarianism.<sup>58</sup> Manual workers in the public sector obtained wage increases of much the same order as workers in private industry. When the National Joint Council for Non-Trading Local Authority Services recommended an increase of 22½p week for men and 15p for women in the autumn of 1944, the total recommended increase for the war period amounted to £1.20 for men and 90p for women. Wages in the partly private and partly public electricity, gas, and water industries rose by similar figures. Workers in the much expanded Royal Ordnance

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* (6 Jan. 1944).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* (27 Sept. 1945).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* (30 Aug. 1945).

<sup>58</sup> Mortimer, *Boilermakers*, table 21.

Factories and dockyards and filling factories were paid the wages laid down in the engineering agreements, the shipbuilding agreements, or the agreements of the chemical industry.

For white collar-workers in the public sector the standard was set by the Civil Service. From 25p a week in 1940 for civil servants with salaries of over £2.50 a week the bonus was increased in stages until November 1944 when it stood at £1.15 a week for men and 92½p for women, with a ceiling of £1,500 above which no bonus was paid—a striking example of egalitarianism. The Local Authority Joint Council for Administrative, Professional, Technical Staff and the teachers' Burnham Committee settled for similar amounts. The original war bonus for local-government officers was fixed at a slightly higher rate than that subsequently settled for civil servants; but most local authorities failed to pay, or paid at a lower rate. The Local Government Officers' Association took the case to the National Arbitration Tribunal which decided that local authorities must pay a bonus, but awarded the Civil Service rate of bonus. Subsequently differences over the bonus were referred to the Industrial Court which awarded the current Civil Service figure up to September 1944 when the National Council agreed its own rate.

The major controversy over the pay of local-government officers was over making up the service pay of local-government officers in the forces, which was permitted but not made obligatory under the Local Government Service (War Service) Act 1938. The union referred several cases to the National Arbitration Tribunal, which it won; but Bolton Corporation refused to accept the award, and appealed to the High Court on grounds of *ultra vires*, arguing that local government was not a 'trade' and local-government officers were not 'workmen' and that the claim did not deal with 'the terms of their employment', since the officers concerned had already left Bolton's employment. The High Court judges found for the union by 2 to 1, but Bolton appealed, and the Court of Appeal found for Bolton. Ernest Bevin and Levi Hill, the general secretary of the union, were disposed to accept the verdict, but Hill found himself faced with 'a resolution threatening revolt of the entire North-Western district if the NEC capitulated now'. They decided to take the case to the House of Lords which in September 1942 found against Bolton on all counts, and awarded costs against them. By the summer of 1943, only Bingley was still refusing to pay. When two of the officers concerned sued the council, the latter tried to dismiss all its officers who were in the forces. The union foiled the Council by persuading the officers' families to withhold their current addresses, so that notice could not be sent to them. In April 1944 the High Court delivered judgment in favour of the two officers, but Bingley

still refused to pay until the bailiffs were brought in—a striking, but hardly commendable, instance of Yorkshire doggedness!<sup>59</sup>

Recruitment to the Royal Army Medical Corps, and the call on hospital services by the blitz in the winter of 1940-1, led to an acute shortage of nurses. The government appealed to trained nurses who were not employed in the health services to join the Civil Nursing Reserve, and urged hospitals that belonged to the Emergency Medical Services, as most of them did, to pay £40 a year salary (with keep) to student nurses, £60 to assistant nurses, and £95 to registered nurses, undertaking to assist voluntary hospitals to meet the cost. Hospitals outside the scheme were urged to pay the same rates, and eventually the government undertook to pay half the difference between the old rates and the new to all hospitals; and the minister announced his intention of setting up a committee on nurses' salaries, as recommended by the Athlone Committee.<sup>60</sup> There were delays due to objections from the employers in voluntary hospitals, represented by the British Hospitals' Association, and from the professional association of nurses, the Royal College of Nursing, but in November 1941 a committee, chaired by Lord Rushcliffe, was appointed for England and Wales, and another, chaired by Professor Taylor, for Scotland, 'to draw up, as soon as possible, agreed scales of wages and emoluments for State registered nurses . . . in Hospitals and Public Health Services, including the service of district nursing, and for student nurses in hospitals approved as training schools'.

Of the twenty-one members representing nurses, three were from the Local Government Officers' Association, five were appointed by the Trades Union Congress from relevant affiliated unions, nine were from the Royal College of Nursing, and four represented other professional associations of nurses; and there were comparable appointments in Scotland. The Joint Conciliation Committee for Mental Hospitals objected to the usurpation of its functions by these new bodies, but eventually agreed to the constitution of separate subcommittees for mental nurses, half of whose members came from the main committees, and half from the Mental Hospitals' Association and the Mental Hospital and Institutional Workers' Union. The committees asked for an extension of their terms of reference to include items such as hours of work, holidays, and pension rights, and this was granted.

The committees recommended substantial increases for all grades of

<sup>59</sup> Spoor, 192-200. Some local authorities refused to pay the war bonuses awarded to teachers by the Burnham Committee, but the House of Lords decided that the teachers came within the scope of Order 1305 which enabled the National Union of Teachers to have its war bonus imposed on Worthing, and to refer their claim for an increase in bonus in 1943 to the National Arbitration Tribunal (Tropp, 229-30).

<sup>60</sup> See 82-3.



nurses, midwives, mental nurses, and public health nurses, except for students. Night duties were to be limited. Nurses were to have one day off each week, and twenty-eight days' leave a year, with a ninety-six-hour fortnight to be introduced when conditions permitted. The Minister of Health estimated that the cost of these improvements would amount to between £1.5 and £2 million a year and undertook to pay half the cost. The recommendations were implemented, thus removing, according to the Trades Union Congress, 'the principal obstacle to the adoption' by the government of 'a policy which would secure a greater inflow to the profession'.<sup>61</sup> Following the publication of the Rushcliffe and Taylor reports,<sup>62</sup> the Ministry of Labour announced a scheme for the recruitment and distribution of nurses and midwives in civil employment, and in September 1943 the Control of Engagement Order was applied to nurses, obliging them to obtain employment only through a Labour Exchange; but the shortage of nurses continued.<sup>63</sup>

Domestic staff for hospitals was also in short supply. In 1941 domestic service in hospitals became one of the forms of essential work that women could undertake under the National Service (NO2) Act; but the shortage continued. Direction under the Essential Work Order was the only remaining remedy, but before making such an order the Minister of Labour was required to satisfy himself about pay and conditions of employment. Bevin set up a committee chaired by Sir Hector Hetherington to investigate, which also covered the school-meals service. Its report, published in November 1943, proposed that the agreements of the joint conciliation committee should be accepted as satisfactory for mental-hospital domestic staff. Four of the provincial councils for local-authority non-trading services provided for general hospital workers, and these should also be accepted. For the rest, the committee made its own proposals, which were adopted, allowing the Essential Work Order to be applied to hospital domestic staff.

### *Special Pay Problems*

Given the size of the engineering industry and the complexity of its pay structure, it could be expected that, under the pressure of war conditions, it would generate a far larger crop of special pay problems

<sup>61</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1943), 34.

<sup>62</sup> Altogether the proposals of the committees required seven separate reports to deal with nurses, midwives, mental nurses, and public-health nurses in England and Wales and in Scotland: Cmd. 6424 (1943); Cmd. 6460 (1943); Cmd. 6487 (1943) and Cmd. 6542 (1944) from the Rushcliffe Committee; Cmd. 6425 (1943); Cmd. 6439 (1943); and Cmd. 6488 (1943) from the Taylor Committee.

<sup>63</sup> The committees continued in existence to make periodic revisions of their salary scales in line with pay in the public services elsewhere; as did a separate Midwives' Salaries Committee.



than any other industry, as indeed it had done in the 1914-18 war.<sup>64</sup> One group of these concerned the pay of skilled time-workers in undertakings where the production workers were paid by results. The first of these to surface affected the toolroom workers. On 4 June 1940 the Engineering Employers' Federation signed an agreement with the Engineers 'for the purpose of ensuring, during war-time emergency, the necessary complement of men and production from toolrooms'. The minimum earnings of 'skilled operators in the toolroom' were not to be 'less than the average earnings of the skilled production workers in the same establishment for the same number of comparable hours worked'. Individual merit rates were to continue to be paid in addition to the average figure.

The Coventry Engineering Employers protested. The new 'shadow' factories built there by the government, in spite of the protests of the local employers, had expanded their labour force by allowing the piece-work earnings of their workers to rise through 'loose' times or prices for piece-work jobs, which under the new agreement would feed through to the toolrooms, and, no doubt, to other skilled time-workers. Coventry therefore concluded a separate agreement relating the pay of skilled toolroom workers to the average earnings of skilled production workers throughout the Coventry district instead of the average in each firm. 'The result was found to be devastating. Workers of all kinds were using the return made under the toolroom agreement to force up their own pay, and earnings in the town, already high, soared far beyond those elsewhere. Several attempts to control piece-work prices met with little success.'<sup>65</sup> The Coventry toolroom rate was able to serve as a target in this way because it was a single published figure, whereas elsewhere the national agreement led only to a set of differing factory-earnings figures not easily interpreted and probably not available to the great majority of engineering workers. Another explanation for high piece-work earnings in Coventry emerged at a meeting of the Engineering Employers' management board on 28 August 1941. The Coventry firm of Standard Motors wanted to adjust 'excessive' piece-work prices on subcontracted aircraft work. These had started as daywork jobs with an allowance of 100 per cent over the time-rate, followed by provisional prices intended to yield 14p an hour in addition to the national bonus, and earnings had now risen far higher than that, with some men earning 25p an hour. The management wanted to get a figure of 17½p an hour, but the men refused to go below 22½p. This difference had been referred to a central conference under the engineering disputes procedure, and the employers' conference committee had decided that it could not

<sup>64</sup> See Clegg, *History*, ii. 182-5.

<sup>65</sup> Wigham, 148.

'sponsor' a rate of 17½p an hour without consulting the management board. The board decided that the reference should be withdrawn, leaving Standard Motors free to settle 'on terms free from the objectionable proposal referred to', and that the board should seek a conference with the Engineers' executive on 'excessive piecework prices'. The Coventry representatives at the meeting explained that the 'general 200 per cent bonus' target in Coventry was due to the casual nature of employment in the car industry.

It was natural for other skilled time-working specialists to envy their colleagues in the toolroom, and in 1941 the Engineers and the Electricians submitted claims for pay increases 'for maintenance workers, inspectors, setters-up and markers-off'. On 31 July 1941 the management board decided that it would offer these workers an addition of not less than 25p a week above the fitter's rate. On 25 September the board noted that in certain districts the position in relation to maintenance men was 'acute'. It proposed that, until an agreement was reached, firms should make 'suitable arrangements' subject to their local associations 'as far as possible on the lines of the federation's proposal'. On 30 October it decided that the situation was threatening to become chaotic with the Royal Ordnance Factories instituting a 'system of lieu rates'<sup>66</sup> which would give maintenance men about £1 a week over the standard rate. The negotiating committee was empowered to settle with the Engineers for 'the best terms possible'. On 15 February 1940 the management board of the federation had approved the payment of an additional rate of at least 40p to patternmakers, who were generally recognized as highly skilled, and the majority of whom were time-workers. Then, at the beginning of 1942 an agreement was signed with the Engineers on behalf of skilled maintenance men, inspectors, setters-up, and markers-off employed on time-work only, giving them 40p a week over the fitter's rate. Men 'with lieu rates, compensatory or other bonuses, or merit rates commonly applied' whose 'earnings thereby' exceeded 40p were not included, but individual merit rates were to 'be maintained'. A similar agreement was signed with the Electricians on behalf of maintenance electricians; and in March the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions signed an agreement on the same terms as that with the Engineers on behalf of unions within the confederation with members in the classes of skilled men covered by the agreement. Once more Coventry provided further complications. It proposed to establish four grades of skilled inspector with rates of pay well in excess of those in the national agreement. The management board did not veto the proposal, but on 24 September 1942 asked for a

<sup>66</sup> These were extra rates for time-workers in lieu of piece-work rates.

'settlement on the basis of an informal domestic arrangement between the AEU locally and the Association rather than by official Local Agreement' for fear of 'serious repercussions in other parts of the country'.

The pressure for increases in pay to compensate skilled time-workers for their inability to increase their earnings through piece-work was reflected lower down the hierarchy of skill by claims from the general unions for lieu rates for labourers servicing piece-workers. Alongside this the general unions raised questions of the appropriate rates of pay for their semi-skilled members working on machines. Many of these were paid on piece-rates, but their earnings were also dependent on their base rates, which in the engineering industry were a matter for settlement in the districts. There had, for example, been a 1925 agreement for a 'Lancashire machine rate', but now some Lancashire districts, such as Oldham, paid a higher rate. During the war the question arose as to whether there should be a national system of grading for semi-skilled jobs, relating pay to the degree of skill required. This issue became especially important in relation to semi-skilled women workers as a result of a dispute at the Rolls-Royce factory at Hillington in Glasgow. On 24 September 1942 the employers' management board was considering a claim from the general unions that women should be paid between 85 per cent and 100 per cent of the labourers' rate, according to their jobs, and should also receive any additional rates paid to the men for those jobs. Most of the members of the board's women's committee wanted to respond to this with a proposal for 'a series of rates designed to remunerate women according to certain particular classes of operations'. It offered four grades, three to be paid at semi-skilled rates and one at the men's skilled rate. The unions proposed the four grades, but also wanted higher rates for the three semi-skilled grades, and contested the employers' definitions for the work appropriate to each grade.<sup>67</sup> The difference was reported to the Ministry of Labour.

The whole issue was complicated by the decision of the Engineers to admit women, which had been carried unanimously at a rules-revision meeting in June 1942, and approved by a small majority in a ballot of the members announced in September. The date at which admission of women was to begin was 1 January 1943, and no one doubted that the consent of the Engineers' executive must be secured before any agreement on women's pay could be finalized. Accordingly nothing was done until May when the Engineers claimed that Rolls-Royce was in breach of the relaxation agreement at Hillington by not paying men's

<sup>67</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, *Management Board Minutes* (26 Nov. 1942).



rates to women employed on what was recognized as men's work. The company claimed that it had been negotiating with the Transport and General Workers and had almost reached agreement on a classification of women's jobs on the lines discussed nationally by the federation and the general unions. The ministry decided to refer the dispute to a court of inquiry, which

held that the Company had not observed the agreement in respect of certain jobs which were clearly men's work, but they inferred that the new provisional agreement of December 1942 was a recognition by the unions of the existence of a wide new field of work meriting an intermediate scale of payment between the women's and the men's rate. The AEU representative did not object to the principle of grading women's work provided the rates related to it were related to those of men. He agreed that the Company's proposals for a system of grading were practicable and capable of adjustment to form a satisfactory system.<sup>68</sup>

The court therefore recommended that negotiations be resumed. The parties agreed, and on 30 October 1943 an agreement was signed to apply to the company's Glasgow factories. It followed the national negotiations in providing for four grades, and proposed a joint allocation committee to classify jobs.

At this point the women 'who had apparently hoped for a wider application of the rates related to men's work' went on strike supported by their shop stewards who had been part of the negotiating team.<sup>69</sup> Eventually an agreement was reached by classifying each machine to determine the rate of pay of its operator. However, this solution did not provide a precedent for a national agreement on grading, which might also have led on to a national agreement on grading male machine-operators. On 26 August the employers' management board was told that the Engineers had written refusing to proceed with a grading agreement on the lines discussed between the employers and the general unions. Their demand now was for equal pay; and the general unions, with the ground cut from under their feet, associated themselves with the claim. Meanwhile, the employers and the government continued to grumble over high piece-work earnings. On 24 June 1943 the employers' management board discussed a case that had gone through the disputes procedure concerning the Rover factory at Coventry, in which it had emerged that the company 'had given a minimum earnings guarantee of 135 per cent to all men, and 100 per cent to women in general, with 150 per cent in the case of two particular women. Prior to

<sup>68</sup> P. Inman, *Labour in the Munitions Industries* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green 1957), 364-5. There does not appear to be any evidence either in the federation records or those of the general unions that the discussions between them had got as far as a 'provisional agreement'.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 365-6.



piecework being operated, the same percentages were applied in the form of a lieu bonus'.<sup>70</sup> The Coventry representatives assured their colleagues that 'efforts were being made in the district to control the position, and already there was a tendency in some directions towards a lower standard of earnings', but gave no evidence for it.

At its meeting on 30 September the board identified a particular problem of piece-work in aircraft construction. It was the 'fixing of prices and times for large groups of perhaps 500 and 600 workpeople all doing the same job . . . making high earnings on their previous job and when a new job comes along, they refused to accept any price which would not, from its very inception, yield the same high earnings as the previous job'. The board observed that it had an agreement with several unions saying that pending agreement, 'the worker shall proceed with the job in accordance with the piecework price or bonus or basis time allowed by Management', which clearly provided a potential solution to the problem, but the Engineers were not party to it. The board was told that the matter had been discussed at a recent conference with the union, but nothing more had been heard. A reminder was sent, and on 30 March 1944 the board was told that the union had now replied, refusing to sign the agreement, and observing that high piece-work earnings were 'isolated instances, generally confined to the Aircraft Industry', but offering 'at any time to consider cases which the Employers brought before their notice in which the Employers felt that the times or prices were excessive or wrong'.

The Ministry of Aircraft Production under Cripps was also concerned about high piece-work earnings in aircraft production. It discussed the issue with the engineering employers nationally and in the Midlands, and conducted its own investigation in October 1942, in which

The highest bonus earnings were recorded in a motor factory in Coventry where on some jobs a bonus of 581 per cent was earned with an average throughout the factory of 324 per cent; and at an airframe shadow factory in Birmingham a bonus of 392 per cent was earned by some workers with an average throughout the factory of 372 per cent.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> There were two elements in the pay of all engineering workers, apart from overtime: a basic rate and a national bonus. The basic rate varied according to the grade of skill, but all workers of the same grade in the same district received the same basic rate. However, the national bonus was higher for time-workers than for piece-workers. At the beginning of 1943 the difference was 10p a week. Piecework earnings were related to the basic rate, but not to the national bonus. At that time the basic rate of the most numerous skilled grade, that of the fitter, was 187½p in the great majority of districts, and his national bonus was 177½p for time-workers, and 167½p for piece-workers. Consequently, since the output of the piece-worker had no effect on the amount of his national bonus, if a piece-working fitter was earning 100 per cent bonus, it did not mean that his earnings were twice those of the time-worker, but a little more than 50 per cent higher.

<sup>71</sup> Inman, 326.

The ministry succeeded in persuading the management and union representatives in one factory in the 'Coventry/Birmingham area' to negotiate a 50 per cent reduction in piece-work prices without a strike; and after Award 326 of the National Arbitration Tribunal on 20 March 1943, its contracts directorate circulated an instruction that the new minimum figure of 27½ per cent over basic rates for piece-work times and prices was henceforth 'to be the basis on which labour costs were estimated', and not 50 per cent as formerly. 'The effect of this "tightening-up" by the Contracts Directorate is difficult to judge. . . . It was agreed . . . that for the shadow factories [which worked on a cost-plus basis] the Ministry had no sanction, and the earnings in these tended to set the pace for the professional firms.'<sup>72</sup> There are two unanswered questions concerning high piece-work earnings: how did commercial firms manage to make ends meet with piece-work earnings running into 200 or 300 per cent or more and contracts based on 50 per cent or less? And what was the relationship between high piece-work earnings and efficiency? In the spring of 1943 the Production Efficiency Board investigated the demand from Coventry for additional labour to meet the expanded aircraft-production programme, and found that there would be no need for it if the existing labour forces were fully used, 'and the chief obstacle to this was the high piece work earnings which prevailed throughout the city. In each factory there was evidence of slackness and lack of discipline'.<sup>73</sup> By contrast Jack Jones, who was at that time district secretary of the Transport and General Workers in Coventry, reported in his autobiography that 'we were able to prove that costs of production were less in Coventry than elsewhere. High productivity accompanied high earnings.'<sup>74</sup> Moreover, this statement has the backing of the official historian, who writes:

there was no evidence to show that the cost of producing Bristol engines in Coventry—the factories concerned in the investigation were largely engaged on engine production—was higher either in manpower or money, than that of similar engines produced in other parts of the country. Indeed the indications were to the contrary.<sup>75</sup>

The engineering employers had told the National Arbitration Tribunal that Award 326 involved a great many problems and that the tribunal might be asked for further interpretations. Within a month the Engineers' executive had issued a circular on unofficial action arising from dissatisfaction with the award, appealing for no 'action prejudicial to the war effort'. The employers noted a crop of difficulties, many of

<sup>72</sup> Inman, 327.

<sup>74</sup> J. L. Jones, 117.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 325.

<sup>75</sup> Inman, 326.

them arising from the differential in the national bonus between piece-workers and time-workers: for example, which rate was to be paid to time-workers who received a bonus related to the piece-workers' output, and on which rate were the overtime earnings of lieu workers to be calculated? On 17 September 1943 the employers met the Engineering Joint Trades Movement to discuss a reference of disputed points to the tribunal. There were four agreed questions to put to the tribunal, and each side had two further questions which were to be referred at its discretion. In fact all eight were put. On all of them, except an issue concerning oil-ship allowances, the tribunal upheld the employers' interpretation of the award. Next the unions referred two points, on which they differed from the employers, to the ministry as disputes for submission to the tribunal. The employers queried whether they could be described as 'disputes', but the ministry accepted them. The first claimed that overtime and nightshift payments for piece-workers should be calculated on the time-workers' base rate plus the time-workers' bonus, on the ground that, if the difference between the time-workers' rate and the piece-workers' rate was meant to compensate the time-worker for lack of opportunity to increase his earnings by increasing his output, that was no reason for the piece-workers' premium rates to be lower than those of the time-worker. The second was that the guaranteed minimum payment for piece-workers should be the time-workers' base rate plus the time-workers' bonus, on the ground that if a piece-worker could not earn that amount by piece-work his pay should not on that account be less than that of the time-worker. On 2 December 1943 the tribunal rejected the first claim but upheld the second (Award 470). Questions continued to arise in relation to Award 326, and when the tribunal issued Award 718 on 24 April 1945, which increased the basic pay of both piece-workers and time-workers by 22½p, with no change in bonus, it phrased it with extreme care to avoid the pitfalls of Award 326; but even so, the employers' federation had to ask the tribunal for an interpretation.

Most engineering piece-workers would have objected strongly to being switched to daywork, and most engineering time-workers envied the piece-workers their earnings, but one union had to be persuaded, with considerable difficulty, to allow its engineering members to accept piecework. The Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers had always set its face against piece-work and on 12 September 1938 the union's executive had ruled that 'in Engineering and Aircraft Workshops where we are unable to control the conditions of employment our members may accept work in such establishments at the recognised rate for woodworkers in such establishments, provided they are paid on purely time rates'. In November 1939 it approached the Secretary of State for

Air, Kingsley Wood, seeking an assurance that its members would not be tempted or obliged to flout its principles. He suggested that it take the matter up with the Engineering Employers' Federation. When it did so, the management board replied that payment by results was a 'recognised condition of working' in engineering and suggested that the Woodworkers suspend their rules for the duration.<sup>76</sup> On receiving this reply, the executive called a special meeting of the union's general council to authorize a ballot on the issue. The members voted to allow piece-working in aircraft establishments. The executive had another motive for the ballot: to prevent a loss of membership to the Engineers. At a meeting on 7–8 November 1940, it decided that 'in view of the vote of our members we now claim our members have an equal right in aircraft establishments with any other union, and we are not prepared to agree that our members can only work in the said industry provided they take out a card of the AEU'.

In the shipbuilding industry, the Woodworkers maintained their ban on piece-work. Although a ballot was held in 1943 to see whether the members wished to change the relevant rule, the decision was to keep it. There are conflicting views about the effect of this decision. Inman says that 'payment by results among joiners even came to an end in certain yards where it was traditionally worked'.<sup>77</sup> However, the historian of the Woodworkers, Connelly, records that the executive found that 'disobedience was so widespread that' it 'doubted the ability of the Society "to preserve the fabric of a powerful and numerically strong craft organisation", if enforcement of plain time working was attempted'.<sup>78</sup> Joiners were nevertheless dissatisfied with their earnings in relation to the piece-workers' earnings, and claimed an additional rate in lieu of piece-work. When this was rejected 'there was a go-slow movement among joiners on the North-East coast which seriously retarded insulation work on tramp ships being converted to carry meat, and led to the transfer of several ships to Canada for completion'.<sup>79</sup>

By contrast, the main shipbuilding union, the Boilermakers, included several traditionally piece-working trades, and the Shipwrights signed a national agreement on payment by results early in 1942. Shortly afterwards the Ministry of Labour and the Admiralty persuaded the Electricians and the Plumbers to drop their objections to piece-work in

<sup>76</sup> Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, *Minutes* (15 Feb. 1940). In Feb. 1941 the executive received a letter from their committee in Bristol asking what it should do about members expelled before the change in the rule for refusing to pay a fine imposed for accepting a bonus system on aircraft production. The executive asked how many members there were and how much the fines were, but its final decision is not recorded.

<sup>77</sup> Inman, 331.  
<sup>78</sup> T. J. Connelly, *The Woodworkers, 1860–1960* (London: Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, 1960), 95.

<sup>79</sup> Inman, 331.



the shipyards. On many jobs it was impossible to fix satisfactory price-lists, but 'job contracts' were settled whereby a price for the job was agreed and the workers then finished it as quickly as they could. Generally the earnings of the Boilermakers were high, and the envy of other shipyard workers. Admiralty figures for June 1944 showed their average earnings to be over £10 a week in every shipbuilding district except Glasgow and Liverpool, where the average weekly wage exceeded £9. In Southampton it was over £15. Platers' helpers, who were classed as semi-skilled and organized by the general unions, complained bitterly of the sharp contrast between their time-work earnings and the piece-work earnings of the platers whom they assisted. In one district 'it was admitted that the platers paid more in income tax than the helpers received in wages'.<sup>80</sup> Earnings were particularly high on tank landing-craft which were built in large numbers in preparation for D-Day, by constructional engineering firms rather than traditional shipbuilding companies, because 'the piece rate prices were agreed by the constructional engineering firms before they had sufficient experience of the work; and it was said that riveters and platers in the shipyards "adopted all kinds of tricks to get away to the golden barges"'.<sup>81</sup>

However, not all members of the Boilermakers' Society working in shipbuilding enjoyed high earnings. Some of the riveters' price-lists dated back to the nineteenth century and their jobs were being radically changed by the introduction of new techniques such as hydraulic riveting, pneumatic riveting, prefabrication, and welding. Some of them made the riveters' work easier, but welding and prefabrication took some of their easier jobs away from them, and reduced their earnings. 'The Society's Executive claimed that in some cases riveters found at the end of the week that they had not earned even as much as a time wage and were then dependent on the goodwill of their foremen to get their wages made up to a reasonable level'.<sup>82</sup> This information makes the high average earnings of the members of the Boilermakers' Society even more remarkable. From 1940 onwards the union attempted to secure a guaranteed minimum rate for riveters. The claim was made on the Clyde, sent to central conference, referred back to the district, rejected, and resubmitted, but no settlement was reached until 1955.<sup>83</sup>

Piece-working was a widely recognized method of payment in the engineering and shipbuilding industries, and, having persuaded the Woodworkers to withdraw their ban on piece-work in engineering, and the Electricians and Plumbers to withdraw their bans in shipbuilding,

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 333.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 97.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 332.

Bevin decided not to use his powers to compel the remaining recalcitrant unions in those industries to accept piece-work. Building was different. It was traditionally a time-working industry. Bevin believed that productivity in building work could be substantially increased by payment by results, especially on the repetitive jobs which constituted a large part of government work in wartime, such as work on army camps and in aircraft factories. Apparently his original intention had been to ask the industry to negotiate bonus rates, but he came to the conclusion that the unions were unlikely to co-operate.<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, following the application of the Essential Work Order<sup>85</sup> to construction in June 1941, a schedule of bonus rates for brickwork and some labouring jobs was issued under the order in July and followed in October by others covering carpentry, joinery, hutting, plastering, painting, and glazing. No departure from these bonus rates was to be permitted on sites scheduled under the order, but, of course, they did not apply to private work.

Acquainted with Bevin's intentions, the executives of the building unions met together on 26 May to record their 'unalterable opposition' to piece-work in their industry which they said 'would not lead to increased production'.<sup>86</sup> However, once the order was in force, they instructed their members to obey the law, and, at the annual conference of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives a few days later, a resolution was passed empowering the federation executive to make 'suitable arrangements' with the employers for controlling payment by results. The Woodworkers voted against it, and their general secretary, Frank Wolstencroft, resigned from the presidency of the federation 'on the ground that he cannot be a party to the imposition of piecework on the members of the ASW engaged in the building industry'. At its next meeting the executive of his union congratulated him on his stand, and reiterated 'its determined opposition to the imposition of any system of payment by results in the building industry without the consent of the members having first been obtained'.<sup>87</sup>

In July the union's general council endorsed these decisions, but in November a national conference of officials and representatives from the district committees heard reports of widespread disregard for the rule from the districts, and also of 'no serious opposition to bonus schemes from carpenters and joiners' from the regional secretaries of the federation.<sup>88</sup> Three days later the rule was suspended, although Wolstencroft promised that it would be restored after the war; and the

<sup>84</sup> National Federation of Building Trade Employers, *Report* (1941).

<sup>85</sup> See pp. above.

<sup>86</sup> Connelly, 93.

<sup>87</sup> Woodworkers, *Minutes* (4 July 1941).

<sup>88</sup> Connelly, 93-4.

executive maintained its opposition to the extension of piece-work to its members outside the order and in other industries. At the end of 1942 it reported success in 'preventing premium bonus being extended to joinery establishments where hutting contracts are being carried out';<sup>89</sup> and in July 1945 it instructed its West of Scotland district committee that if certain work at the Scotstown Iron Works in Glasgow was 'common both to our craft and other crafts accepting PBR' there would be no objection to its members being paid under that system, but if 'it is work which our craft can legitimately claim as its own prerogative, and to accept payment would be contrary to the spirit of the General Rule, then action should be taken to see that it is stopped'.<sup>90</sup>

Another wartime innovation was the Uniformity Agreement covering the whole construction industry, both building and civil engineering. Following government pressure, this agreement was approved by both industries in June 1940, and applied to all construction jobs carried out by, or on behalf of, the government, under the supervision of a joint board representing both sides of the two industries. The aim was to prevent differences in conditions of employment obstructing mobility of construction workers from one part of the country to another, and mobility between building and civil-engineering jobs. A standard forty-seven-hour week overrode the differences in working hours in the building industry from one district to the next. There were standard provisions for fares and lodging allowances, and a guarantee against 'broken time' (or 'wet time'—pay lost through bad weather). As with the acceptance of payment by results, the vote on this agreement in the National Federation of Building Operatives was carried against the opposition of the Woodworkers, who saw in it some obscure threat to craft principles and had not the same concern with broken time as trades that worked on the outside of buildings, such as the Bricklayers and the Slaters.

### *Manpower*

The engineering unions had made their main contribution to resolving the problem of labour shortages in the production of munitions by the agreement of most of the skilled unions to the relaxation of trade practices that reserved certain jobs for craftsmen, and by the agreement, signed also by the general unions, to the extended employment of women. Henceforth it was the responsibility of the employers and the government to make use of the opportunities presented to them by these agreements.

<sup>89</sup> Woodworkers, *Minutes* (9, 10, 11 Dec. 1942).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* (4, 5 July 1945).

There was some trouble, though surprisingly little of it, with the Engineers' district committees. Several of them complained to the executive council that women were being introduced into machine shops without notification and while the branches still had unemployed members on their books. The invariable reply of the executive was that women were to be employed only if there was no male labour available, and 'in any case, only after consultation'.<sup>91</sup> At the beginning of 1941 the executive authorized a national organizer, along with the district secretary, to decide all applications under the relaxation agreement at Barrow—a traditionally troublesome district, 'until the District Committee are prepared to reconstitute the Local Joint Committee and operate and give effect to the National Agreement and the Executive Council's instructions'.<sup>92</sup> There were differences with the Engineering Employers' Federation over consultation with shop stewards where women were to be employed on men's work. Its management board would not accept that the consent of the stewards was required, but 'there was no particular reason why a proposal to introduce them should not be disclosed to the representatives of the male workers likely to work in conjunction with the women or be associated with them'.<sup>93</sup> There were also problems over the trade union membership of male dilutees. At the beginning of 1940 the Engineers were told of complaints from the employers' federation of 'reports from certain parts of the country that our members were claiming that no man should be made an alternative or supplementary worker unless he was or became a member of the A.E.U.'.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, in July the Nottingham district committee of the union reported to the executive 'a deep-rooted objection on the part of certain members' to admitting dilutees to membership.<sup>95</sup>

However, there were two engineering unions that maintained 'strenuous opposition to dilution'.<sup>96</sup> They were the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers and the Midland Sheet Metal Workers' Society. They did indeed sign a dilution agreement with the Engineering Employers' Federation in May 1940, which was confined to work of national importance and to male dilutees, who must all be paid the skilled rate. 'The unions refused to admit that any sheet metal work of a semi-skilled character existed, although under modern methods of quantity production such as existed in the aircraft factories a very considerable proportion of the work was in fact semi-skilled'.<sup>97</sup> In some aircraft firms work of this kind was carried on under the

<sup>91</sup> Woodworkers, *Minutes* (10 July 1940).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* (15 Jan. 1941).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* (29 Aug. 1940).

<sup>94</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (Feb. 1940).

<sup>95</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, Executive Council, *Minutes* (10 July 1940).

<sup>96</sup> Inman, 61.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*



engineering agreements away from the sheet-metal shops, and for this reason there was no shortage of sheet-metal workers; but the Ministry of Labour pressed for the introduction of women dilutees in order to release younger men for the services. Nevertheless attempts to revise the May 1940 agreement failed, and 'the position about dilution in sheet metal shops remained unsatisfactory to the end of the war'.<sup>98</sup>

Apart from the sheet-metal workers, it was among employers and managers, not trade unions, that the ministry discerned the main obstruction to dilution.

As the Ministry of Labour intensified its efforts to promote dilution and the redistribution of skilled workers, the Minister complained that these efforts met with almost continuous opposition from employers. The M[inistry of] A[ircraft] P[roduction] also complained of the completely negative attitude displayed by contractors to the many appeals made to release skilled labour. Even the parent firms of M.A.P. shadow factories were reluctant to release labour to help their offspring. Firms were also unwilling to release semi-skilled labour for higher grade training in the Ministry of Labour's Training Centres. Opposition to dilution also arose in some R[oyal] O[rdnance] F[actories]. Ministry of Labour inspectors observed of one in October 1941 that though the higher management was in favour of dilution opposition was most marked on the shop side; the whole training of departmental heads persuaded them that only the best type skilled operatives could produce guns. . . . In 1940-41 the labour supply inspectors, having secured agreement to the release of so many workers in a certain trade, left the selection of individuals to management. Sometimes the firms chose those of least skill in their particular occupation, the bad timekeepers and idlers, or the very young or very old, and therefore the least mobile of their workmen.<sup>99</sup>

The minister had powers of direction under Defence Regulation 58A, but was reluctant to use them, and, because he did not wish to prosecute those who refused to obey a direction to another job or left without permission, the threat of prosecution lost its force. Bevin decided that he needed new powers which would enable him to remove some of the genuine objections held by workers against compulsory transfers. One of these was the uncertainty of the job to which the worker was to be transferred. Would he be continuously employed? Could he be dismissed? Under what conditions would he work? Bevin decided that the scheduling of an undertaking as 'essential work' for the purpose of a new order must oblige the employers to pay transferees a guaranteed weekly wage and not to dismiss them without the consent of the national service officer. Initially industries were to be scheduled, and thereafter the new order could be applied to undertakings within those industries. Before scheduling, the minister was to satisfy himself that the terms and

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 62.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

conditions of employment were satisfactory, which normally meant that they had been agreed with the appropriate trade union or unions, that welfare provisions in the undertakings were acceptable, and that, where training would be needed, adequate training facilities were available. Since time would be needed to make the necessary enquiries, provisional certificates could be issued, valid for three months. With these conditions satisfied, Bevin felt that he would be entitled to direct workers to scheduled undertakings, and to forbid them to leave without the permission of the national service officer; and to prosecute offenders. Having secured authorization from the War Cabinet, Bevin put his proposals to a meeting of the National Joint Advisory Council on 29 January 1941. He justified them by the need of the armed forces for more men. Every industry must give its quota. He emphasized all the safeguards, including provision for reinstatement in the transferee's original job. For the General Council, George Gibson said that most of the criticisms he had intended to make were now 'dispelled', but he wanted provision for consultation before the order was applied to an undertaking.

The General Council met again the next day. Several resolutions were proposed protesting against compulsion to transfer (on the grounds that voluntary procedures had not been exhausted) and against lack of consultation. Members of the Council were also incensed over a recent Fire Watchers Order which they asserted had been issued without consultation. In the end they decided that the consultative committee should protest to Bevin on the lack of consultation over his manpower proposals and that the National Joint Advisory Council should deal with the 'general problem of non-consultation' through the Labour ministers. A deputation led by Hallsworth saw Bevin and reported to the Council on 4 February. Hallsworth had expressed 'very strong feeling . . . about the lack of consultation'. Bevin replied that the Fire Watchers Order was not his, but the Home Secretary's, and he 'did not think that the General Council were justified in saying that there had been no consultation on man-power'. He had raised it with them twice, the last time 'at the Consultative Committee before Christmas', when he had said 'that he would desire to raise the whole question of man-power with them at an early date'. Little attention was paid to the substance of Bevin's proposals. The Council agreed a press statement: 'The General Council noted with satisfaction that the Government proposed to use the voluntary method to the utmost possible extent, and decided to request all affiliated unions to co-operate with their respective employers' organisation.'

The General Council side of the National Joint Advisory Council considered the Essential Work Order (General Provisions Order) on 27

February 1941. A resolution was moved by Harry Harrison of the General and Municipal Workers and James Kaylor of the Engineers to reject the draft because it made no provision for overtime to be paid in addition to the guaranteed wage and there was no 'higher rate for compulsorily transferred workers'. An amendment from John Brown of the Iron and Steel Confederation and George Chester of the Boot and Shoe Operatives proposed acceptance subject to the rate of pay being either that of the district from which the worker was transferred or that of the district to which he was sent, whichever was the higher, and subject to pointing out that the guarantee did not take account of any overtime. The amendment was carried by 6 votes to 3. The decision did not, however, deal with the main problem of pay in relation to transfers, which continued to cause difficulties throughout the war—the substantial differences in earnings from one undertaking to another due to piece-work.<sup>100</sup>

When Bevin had presented his proposals to the National Joint Advisory Council on 29 January he had made specific reference to the shipbuilding industry:

I invite the shipbuilding employers and the shipbuilding unions to consider what scheme they can put up to make possible interchangeability, to make possible the full use of that man-power to get the biggest output; that is what we want, output. We were not worried whether the man earns £5 a week or £10 a week. . . . There will be no cutting of rates. . . . I honestly believe that something like the present number of men properly organised could solve this problem.

Bevin's emphasis on interchangeability in the shipyards was related to the difficulty of exploiting the possibilities of dilution there. This was not because these possibilities were sparse.

In some ways there was considerable scope for dilution in the shipbuilding industry both by 'de-skilling' the work and by upgrading semi-skilled workers to skilled work. . . . Some work rated as skilled work in British yards, such as riveting, caulking and burning was only rated as semi-skilled in many other countries and in the royal dockyards was done by a special grade of labour below the skilled mechanics.<sup>101</sup>

De-skilling in engineering had come mainly by means of the introduction of machinery to facilitate repetitive jobs, and 'the absence of any similar technical development in the shipbuilding industry undoubtedly strengthened the workers in their opposition to dilution'.<sup>102</sup>

In May and June 1940 the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation had signed dilution agreements with the Boilermakers, the Electricians, and

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 66–7.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 125.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 126.

the Engineers, but these merely sanctioned dilution where agreement could be reached locally. The worst difficulties occurred with the Boilermakers' Society. Local autonomy was enshrined in its constitution and in the hearts and minds of the members, who had experienced heavier unemployment than fitters and electricians during the Depression, and discounted assurances of the restoration of pre-war practices after the war. They did not, in most instances, refuse to consider dilution, but they prolonged discussions interminably. 'There were rarely strikes against dilution because it was rarely pressed to that point'; and 'the last, and ultimately the greatest obstacle to the dilution of the shipbuilding labour force' was 'the shortage of unskilled workers'.<sup>103</sup> At the peak of activity in the industry, in 1943-4, the total number of dilutees, both men and women, was 'about 7 per cent of the skilled labour force' in private firms, and many of these were men already skilled in other trades, such as joiners acting as dilutee shipwrights.<sup>104</sup> In the Royal Dockyards, where dilution and upgrading had long been practised, the main limitation on dilution was also the lack of unskilled workers. In these circumstances, interchangeability between the different crafts seemed an attractive alternative to dilution, especially given the traditional narrow subdivision of tasks between the crafts. Following Bevin's statement to the National Joint Advisory Council, the Essential Work Order for shipbuilding provided for the payment of a guaranteed wage to 'any person . . . willing to perform any services outside his usual occupation which in the circumstances he can reasonably be asked to perform during any period when work is not available for him in his usual occupation in the undertaking'.<sup>105</sup> After failures in several other areas, a proposal for interchangeability at John Brown's shipyard on the Clyde, which had the support of the yard committee and both sides of the industry locally was blocked by the unions at a series of meetings in London.

Each time the unions insisted that their present agreements permitted complete interchangeability, and the Boilermakers' Society made it quite clear that the only interchangeability it would accept was between the various crafts inside its own union. The employers . . . seem to have reconciled themselves to the unions' opposition, and reported to the Central Consultative Committee early in 1943 that the present position was regarded as reasonably satisfactory. There the matter rested for the remainder of the war.<sup>106</sup>

Compared with the shipyards, the engineering industry made substantial progress with dilution and transfers, in which it was assisted by several special factors and arrangements. The reluctance of skilled

<sup>103</sup> Inman, 131, 136.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* 152.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 141.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 153.



employees in the Royal Ordnance Factories to transfer from one ordnance factory to another for fear of loss of earnings was diminished by the creation of a volunteer Ministry of Supply Mobile Corps of toolmakers and setters-up in December 1941. They were liable to transfer to another ordnance factory for a period of up to two months where they were paid 'on a very attractive scale'.<sup>107</sup> In fact most of them stayed in the factory to which they were transferred until the end of the war. These transfers brought about a redistribution of skilled labour from the old ordnance factories to the new, many of which were situated in areas with an abundant supply of female labour, and enabled the numbers of women employed there to be considerably increased.

In December 1941 the system of block reservation from call-up to the services was replaced by a system of individual deferment administered by district manpower boards. When dealing with workers who, they felt, could be more usefully employed in munitions work, they might transfer them there, especially after their powers were revised in 1943 to enable their attention 'to be increasingly concentrated on the distribution of civilian manpower in their districts'.<sup>108</sup> Of special relevance to dilution were the courses provided by government training centres and technical colleges in a range of engineering skills. There were two levels of training: a basic course and a higher-grade course. Between September 1939 and June 1945 nearly 132,000 men and nearly 130,000 women completed basic courses and were placed in jobs, and nearly 7,000 men and over 15,000 women completed higher-grade courses and were placed.<sup>109</sup>

The acceptance of women dilutees in the engineering industry was probably facilitated by the decision of the Engineers to admit women into their union from 1 January 1943. By the end of the year over 138,000 women had joined the union. Between June 1939 and December 1943 the number of women employed in the engineering and allied industries increased from 411,200 to 1,544,000. As a proportion of the total engineering labour force, the increase was from 18 per cent to 39 per cent. It is impossible to give the proportion of women who were employed on skilled work, but the proportion of women employed on skilled and semi-skilled work, taken together, rose from 75 per cent in June 1940 to between 84 and 85 per cent between 1942 and 1944. Inman states that 'only a very small proportion of women were employed in the highly skilled grades', but 'many women were employed on welding work requiring various degrees of skill, and at this they excelled'.<sup>110</sup> While it seems reasonable to suggest that the recruitment

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>109</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for the Years 1939-1946*, Cmd. 7225 (Sept. 1947), app. 9

<sup>108</sup> Parker, 307.

<sup>110</sup> Inman, 79-80.

of women by the Engineers probably eased their acceptance as dilutees, the inclusion of tracers in the Draughtsmen's Association since 1922 did not assist dilution in the drawing-office. Early in 1942 the Engineering Employers' Federation made proposals for upgrading tracers to allow them to undertake some work previously reserved for draughtsmen. 'The Association replied . . . that they would be prepared to consider each case on its merits providing that there was reasonable consultation with the Association and registration of the upgrading, together with suitable safeguards. After these discussions very little more was heard of this suggested form of dilution.'<sup>111</sup>

The other main constituent of the metals- and engineering-group of industries after engineering and shipbuilding—iron and steel—had no prejudice against dilution. As the industry was organized on the basis of promotion by seniority to the more responsible jobs, dilution meant no more than increasing the pace of promotion and taking on more unskilled workers for the jobs at the bottom of the promotion ladders. In addition, in 1940 an agreement was made for the employment of women after twelve weeks' training at 82.5 per cent of the man's rate.

The building industry was, like engineering and shipbuilding, a traditional craft industry, and, unlike engineering, a male preserve. Nevertheless, even before the war some employers had employed women on less-skilled woodworking jobs. On 4 December 1940 the Woodworkers' executive council sanctioned a withdrawal of labour from a firm that was proposing to employ women in the manufacture of two-tier bunks for service huts, 'provided joint action is taken by all the trades concerned'. By contrast, on 6 January 1941 it instructed its district committees to settle with employers the pay, conditions, and work to be performed by women. No carpenter or joiner was to be discharged to make room for women, and when the union was in a position to offer skilled men to the employer the number of women was to be correspondingly reduced. In June 1941 it was decided that, by paying the 'district levy' women should be entitled to the full services of the union, but should not be admitted to membership.<sup>112</sup> In October 1941 the National Joint Council for the Building Industry agreed general terms on pay and conditions of employment for women in the industry. Nevertheless the Woodworkers maintained their stand. On 5 March 1942 their executive instructed the Bradford district committee, which had been approached by a local firm, that they were 'not prepared to agree to this firm introducing a bonus system, neither is the Executive Council prepared to enter into an agreement with this firm, or any other firm, permitting male dilutees being started. As regards female labour,

<sup>111</sup> Mortimer, *Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen*, 217.

<sup>112</sup> Connelly, 90.

this can only be engaged in accordance with the war-time agreement covering Female Labour.' However, the building unions did not face a major challenge from the wartime entry of women into their traditionally male preserve. The total number of women employed in building and civil engineering rose from 15,700 in mid-1939 to a peak of 25,600 in mid-1943. By contrast, in the equally male-dominated iron-and-steel industries the increase in the number of women employed was from 8,600 to 63,600.<sup>113</sup>

By 1941 the heavy unemployment that had been the initial consequence of the war in the printing industry had been replaced by a tight labour market. In February a general dilution agreement provided for relaxation of customs to be negotiated with the individual unions. The agreement with the Typographical Association provided for its branches to negotiate terms for relaxation with the local employers' organizations, and these allowed for 'house variations' with the approval of the local committee. Local agreements had to be sanctioned by the union's head office. The result was not a large influx of women into the industry. In fact the number of women employed fell substantially compared to 1939, but not as much as men's employment, which was more than halved. In August 1941 the Typographical Association approved a scheme for training women for craft jobs. If they proved to be competent they were to be paid the craft rate.

Labour shortage also led to the extensive employment of women on the railways and road passenger transport. The number of women employed on the railways rose from 26,000 in 1939 to 114,000 at the end of the war.<sup>114</sup> By 1944, 36,000 of them were working on 'men's jobs' in the conciliation grades such as porters and engine-cleaners. The unions, of course, insisted that they should be paid the full male rate after thirteen weeks' probation, but initially wanted them to be confined to the junior grades. In 1943 the Railwaymen agreed that they could also be promoted to higher grades, such as guard, but the executive council insisted that they should usually be trained in pairs (perhaps for their protection). By this time the labour shortage was acute, for the wartime volume of passengers and goods traffic was far above peacetime figures, especially after the arrival of American troops in Britain; and the Ministry of Labour was encouraging or directing youths to train as firemen. 'The main difficulty in recruiting labour for railway work was that pay and conditions were proving very unattractive, especially compared to the new and growing munitions industries.'<sup>115</sup> In addition much railway work was dirty and exposed to the weather. Welfare

<sup>113</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for the Years 1939-1946* Cmd. 7225 (Sept. 1947), app. 9.

<sup>114</sup> Bagwell, 581.

<sup>115</sup> C. I. Savage, *Inland Transport* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green, 1957), 422.



facilities were poor, and young signalmen and firemen were required to work night shifts. The Minister of Labour did not 'consider the conditions of employment sufficiently satisfactory for him to take very special steps to recruit juveniles for railway work'.<sup>116</sup>

In March 1940 the municipal bus undertakings asked the Transport and General Workers to allow them to employ women bus conductors. The union was prepared to agree, provided the women were paid the same rates as men. The employers wanted to pay less. The difference was referred to the Industrial Court. In May the court awarded that women conductors, who must be over 18 years old, should be paid not less than 90 per cent of the male rate for their first six months, and thereafter the full male rate. If they were over 21 they should have the full rate forthwith. This award was also accepted by London Transport, and both London Transport and the municipal undertakings applied it to women cleaners. There was more difficulty with the company bus undertakings, some of which had employed women before the war at special 'women's rates'. Settlements were eventually achieved with most of them on similar lines to the municipal agreements. Yorkshire Traction wanted to maintain its pre-war agreement on women's rates, but the union was able to persuade the company to increase the women's rates by 15p a week, on the ground that, given the increased number of women replacing men, that would actually yield a saving!<sup>117</sup> The next step was predictable. In September 1941 the employers approached the union for permission to train and employ women drivers. The union's executive council expressed surprise that there had been no discussion before the proposal was put to it, but said it had no objection, provided of course that the full male rate was paid. By December the municipal undertakings had agreed to pay, as for women conductors, 90 per cent of the man's rate for six months and the full rate thereafter, but for women who had served six months as conductors the full male driver's rate was to be paid at once. The companies insisted that the union should settle the matter with the individual undertakings; but one major group accepted the terms agreed by the municipalities, and the rest fell into line. Absenteeism was high among women conductors. According to the regional transport commissioners, it averaged 20 to 25 per cent. They agreed that most of it was due to justifiable causes, but the result was 'increased hours of work for the crews on duty, and excessive hours led to absenteeism and wastage'.<sup>118</sup>

There were dilution agreements in many other industries, for

<sup>116</sup> Savage, 424.

<sup>117</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *Acting General Secretary's Second Quarterly Report* (1941).

<sup>118</sup> Savage, 526.



example in gas and electricity supply. In the retail trades the question was settled by an award made by John Forster, the chairman of the Co-operative Union's conciliation board. A woman substituted for a man was to be paid 80 per cent of the man's rate for the first six months, and the full rate thereafter, but only if she was carrying out 'the full range of duties and responsibilities of the male worker for whom she is substituted', and these duties had to differ 'in their nature, character, and scope' from work 'normally undertaken by women'.<sup>119</sup> In May 1940 the executive of the Agricultural Workers accepted the proposal for a Women's Land Army in view of the need 'for the fullest possible production from the land' (although they did 'not generally approve of women working in certain occupations on the land') so long as they were to enjoy 'proper' wages and conditions.<sup>120</sup> By May 1942 the Land Army numbered 28,000 and an Emergency Land Corps was enrolling women volunteers to work part-time.<sup>121</sup> In addition the government proposed that schoolchildren over 12 years of age should be allowed to work on farms, with the permission of a parent or guardian, for no more than thirty-six hours a week in total. A deputation from the union and the Trades Union Congress General Council protested to the Home Secretary who 'argued that it was absolutely essential'.<sup>122</sup> However, the union's conference resolved unanimously to reject the proposal, to which it was 'inflexibly opposed'. The resolution was moved by its president, Edwin Gooch, who told the conference that 'He disagreed with the Cabinet's opinion, and he claimed to know as much about agricultural conditions as the Prime Minister. . . . He was grieved that one of the Ministers backing the scheme was the Home Secretary. . . . Herbert Morrison ought to know better, even in the midst of war.'<sup>123</sup>

On 25 November 1942 the General Council considered a government proposal that the power to direct women to essential work should be extended from full-time work to part-time work. Citrine and Dukes wanted to reject it, but Marchbank suggested that as compulsion already applied to married women without children, the proposal should be accepted, with 'the necessary safeguards with respect to domestic circumstances', and conditions not less favourable than those for full-time employees, and subject to trade union agreements. If men and women employees were to be directed to more essential work, they had to leave their current jobs. To facilitate their departure, the government adopted a scheme of 'concentration'. Firms were selected for closure, with arrangements made for transferring their orders to other firms, and

<sup>119</sup> This decision, not surprisingly, gave rise to considerable problems of proof. Individual cases could be referred to the board, where the union undertook to abide by the decision (Richardson, 149-50).

<sup>120</sup> *Landworker* (May 1940).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* (May 1942).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* (June 1942).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* (July 1942).

their labour force was then available for direction to more essential jobs. Inevitably the main victim of this process was the cotton industry. The industry's organizations proposed that some machinery should be stopped in every mill, but the government insisted on closures, and in all several hundred mills were shut. The exercise was managed by the Cotton Control Board, which had been set up in 1939 under an Act of Parliament, following pressure from both sides of the industry, with powers to promote schemes for eliminating surplus plant, regulating prices, and assisting sales. It continued as an advisory body during the war, 'and its staff administered much of the war-time controls'.<sup>124</sup> Employment in the cotton industry fell from 340,000 in mid-1939 to 213,000 in mid-1945.<sup>125</sup> Another industry subject to concentration was hosiery where the labour force was reduced from 95,300 in March 1941 to 76,000 in October 1945. 'The arrangements made were almost all voluntary.'<sup>126</sup>

One means of increasing the volume of labour available was for the existing workers to work longer. The immediate response to the crisis of May 1940 was a widespread extension of overtime working. One of the more extreme cases was the construction industry. In June 1940 the government's Production Council decided that on government work of the highest priority a seventy-two-hour week should be worked until the end of the month. On other urgent government work, sixty hours should not be exceeded, and on contracts of less urgency the limit should be fifty-four hours. With the approach of winter, the advisory panels of the building and engineering industries gave their opinion that

beyond a certain limit, output would not be increased by a further extension of weekly working hours. . . . Notwithstanding this advice, the Government decided to allow Departments to require the working of Saturdays and Sundays on all building and civil engineering jobs financed wholly or partly out of public funds, where this was held to be desirable either for the purpose of securing output or for the purpose of retaining men who might otherwise be attracted elsewhere.<sup>127</sup>

Elsewhere 'supply Ministers exhorted their contractors to work full time seven days a week. Some employers took it for granted that they could now disregard statutory restrictions, and in any case factory inspectors were authorised to sanction, without reference to headquarters, extended hours and work for a seventh day, as well as night work for women and young people over sixteen years of age. The response was

<sup>124</sup> H. A. Turner, *Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962), 358.

<sup>125</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for the Years 1939-1946*, app. 9.

<sup>126</sup> Gurnham, 129.

<sup>127</sup> National Federation of Building Trade Employers, *Report* (1940).

magnificent . . . but the pace could not be sustained.'<sup>128</sup> In July 1940 Bevin called a halt, proposing that 'hours of work for both men and women should be limited to sixty a week, with regular rest days'.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, over the winter, 'most of the shipbuilding districts worked a seven-day week, though some provided for an occasional Sunday off and in Scotland one Sunday in four was regularly free'.<sup>130</sup> However, 'by September 1943 the Departments concerned had accepted maxima of fifty-five hours for men and fifty for women as desirable . . . not only because it became increasingly clear that long hours were unprofitable, but also, it could be argued, because the strain of war-time work was cumulative'.<sup>131</sup>

The Civil Service also made its contribution, offering

to work whatever additional hours were necessary. [The national staff side] further offered to forgo any overtime pay until 44 hours had been worked in any week. On 25 May [1940] a statement was issued by the Treasury stating that the government had expressed appreciation of this approach by the national staff side and were arranging immediately to take full advantage of it. . . . it was agreed that the absolute minimum hours of attendance of all civil servants would be not less than 48 per week, but for the immediate future a working week of not less than 54 hours should be aimed at. It was further agreed that no payment for overtime need be made until 44 hours had been worked in any one week.<sup>132</sup>

The application of Essential Work Orders continued rapidly through 1941.

By the end of 1941 over 3,500 undertakings (or in the case of the building industry, sites) had been scheduled under the Special Orders, covering approximately 1,100,000 workers of whom the great majority were, of course, men. Thus under the combined operations of the principal and particular Essential Work Orders some 30,000 undertakings affecting about 5¾ million workers had been scheduled in the course of nine months.<sup>133</sup>

However, the Ministry of Labour was sparing in its use of compulsory transfers under the orders. Fewer than 3,000 directions were issued up to July 1941, with another 11,000 up to the end of the year, and nearly 24,000 in the first half of 1942—the majority of them to building workers. Perhaps the main effect of the orders was to facilitate voluntary transfers: 'many workers no doubt agreed to take the employment they were offered because they knew they could be compelled to accept it'.<sup>134</sup>

The value of the orders, however, was by no means limited to the

<sup>128</sup> Parker, 442.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 307.

<sup>132</sup> James E. Mortimer and Valerie A. Ellis, *A Professional Union* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 107.

<sup>133</sup> Parker, 141.

<sup>129</sup> Inman, 295.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 295.

<sup>134</sup> Inman, 65.

promotion of labour mobility. Scheduling under the orders was used as an opportunity to extend and reconstruct collective bargaining, since Bevin had to be satisfied with the terms and conditions of employment in the undertakings concerned before these were scheduled, and settlement by negotiation with trade unions was an important criterion for this purpose. Bevin used his powers to secure a dramatic expansion in the scope of collective bargaining, and 1941 was a bumper year for the formation of joint industrial councils. No fewer than fifty-five national joint industrial councils or equivalent bodies were set up during the war years.<sup>135</sup> Bevin also used the orders to improve conditions of employment. The Merchant Navy Order established a Merchant Navy Reserve Pool to make sure, now that seamen were no longer allowed to take shore jobs, that they would be granted adequate leave and receive pay for periods ashore between voyages. 'Accordingly, all officers and men who had, at the date of the Order, recently terminated their voyages, and all who subsequently ended their voyages, were entered into this Reserve and received what came to be known as pool pay while waiting for appointment to another ship.'<sup>136</sup> The scheme was run by the Shipping Federation but all important decisions concerning a man or officer had to be cleared with his union representative, and the terms of membership of the reserve were negotiated by the National Maritime Board.

The application of the Essential Work Order to dock labour was used to achieve a more far-reaching reform. Before the war, port-registration committees under joint Port Registration Schemes had been used to reduce the numbers employed in some docks, and therefore also the level of underemployment. In 1940 the Dock Labour (Compulsory Registration) Order made registration obligatory in ports that had such schemes, and dockers had to hold themselves in readiness to transfer to another port to meet a diversion of shipping. Employment, however, remained casual, and the transfer scheme was unsatisfactory, especially in Liverpool and Glasgow, of whose port authorities Bevin had a low opinion, believing that both 'were moribund as far as any new ideas were concerned and dominated by private shipping interests which gave no thought to the national interest. When war broke out the equipment in both ports was out of date and their method of handling cargoes inefficient'.<sup>137</sup> Early in 1941 Bevin proposed a scheme of permanent employment in the North-west ports (Merseyside, Manchester, and Clydeside) at a weekly wage of £4.12½ plus any piece-work earnings in excess of 75p a day. Deakin, now acting general secretary of the

<sup>135</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for the Years 1939-1946*, Cmd. 7225 (Sept. 1947), app. 22.

<sup>136</sup> Parker, 139.

<sup>137</sup> Bullock, ii. 197.



Transport and General Workers, reported to his Finance and General Purposes Committee on 6 February that 'in view of the extreme urgency of the problem and the possibility of the Government introducing compulsory measures in the event of failure to introduce a voluntary scheme of effective character', he had secured the agreement of the executive council by 'telegraphic whip'. The scheme was expected to be in operation by the beginning of March. It was to be administered by the Ministry of War Transport through its regional port directors. Difficulties, however, cropped up almost at once in its operation, and on 11 June Deakin told his executive council that Bevin had authorized a confidential inquiry into its operation by a representative of the Ministry of Transport, another from the Ministry of Labour, an employer, and Deakin himself.

Meanwhile the application of the Essential Work Order was under consideration. Here again the intention was to employ dockers on a weekly basis with a guaranteed wage, but, no doubt because of dissatisfaction with the North-west scheme, a different method of administration was proposed. There was to be a National Dock Labour Corporation of equal numbers of employer and union representatives, with an independent chairman, and its own managers in the ports. Dockers were to continue to attend 'calls' at the docks twice a day, for selection by an employer or his foreman. If not engaged the docker entered a reserve pool, which entitled him to an attendance payment. The scheme was to run alongside the North-west scheme. Henceforth all dockers were guaranteed a weekly wage and subject to the discipline of regular employment. According to Deakin, 'It may be that the scheme will provide a basis upon which to build a post-war arrangement for the docks which will finally go far to remove our members from the casual nature of employment'.<sup>138</sup> The scheme came into force in September 1941.

The North-west scheme continued to cause trouble, especially in Liverpool. In his *Seventh Quarterly Report* in December 1941 Deakin reported 'a great number of problems and sharp conflict has arisen in consideration of the attitude of the Port Regional Director in relation to the method of handling negotiations'. He met his Liverpool officers on 6 February 1942 and in the following quarter (March 1942) reported that 'a much better outlook and understanding has been reached on many of the problems with which we were confronted, such as piece work, manning of gangs, absenteeism, wastage of man-power from the scheme, and collection of Union contributions'. However, Bevin was

<sup>138</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, *Acting General Secretary's Sixth Quarterly Report* (1941).

still dissatisfied with the turn-round in the ports, and, along with the Minister of War Transport, Lord Leathers, he summoned a national conference of 'all the interests in the docks' and told them that 'It would be nine months . . . before they could look for relief of the shipping shortage. During this time the Government asked for a day, or a day and a half, to be saved on the turn round of every ship. That could be done if the restrictions on overtime and double shift working were abandoned.'<sup>139</sup> As an example of what was currently going wrong in the ports, he said: 'Over one third of the men in the North West, particularly in Liverpool, are breaking their guarantee: that is, they do not get it because they do not turn up every day . . . We cannot retain a man in a port in a time like this who is not going to play the game.'<sup>140</sup>

If the National Dock Labour Corporation was more satisfactory than the North-west scheme, it might appear that a merger of the two should have been considered. In June and again in September 1941 Deakin reported that the creation of a uniform scheme was under consideration. On the second occasion he reported that a joint subcommittee had been set up with the employers to consider the matter, but on 9 October he told his Finance and General Purposes Committee that there had been a government inquiry into the North-west scheme, and on 5 November that a new regional port director had been appointed. That was the last that was heard of the matter until December 1944, when in his *Eighteenth Quarterly Report* Deakin told his members that the union was still trying to achieve a merger of the two schemes.

In some instances, such as the merchant navy and the docks, unions welcomed the advantages gained from the application of the Essential Work Order. In others they accepted it with reasonable grace. Not so the Miners. Having gathered that the order was likely to be applied to their industry, their executive committee resolved on 2 April 1941 'That this Federation declares its opposition to the principle of compulsion as applied to the retention in, or return to the industry of mineworkers, unless satisfactory wage standards can be negotiated and some effective measure of control of the industry be extended to the Workmen's representatives'.<sup>141</sup> When they met the owners and later ministers, three of these points were rejected: a joint national board to deal with all questions affecting coalmining, a satisfactory guaranteed minimum wage,<sup>142</sup> and the abolition of non-unionism. A special conference was

<sup>139</sup> Bullock, ii. 208.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Arnot, 314. By contrast, in 1917 the promise that government control of the mines would bring a system of national wage settlement had persuaded the Miners to accept it (Clegg, *History* ii. 163).

<sup>142</sup> By this they meant satisfactory to themselves, not to the Minister of Labour and National Service, as the terms would have to be before the order was applied.

called for 8 May 1941. The vice-chairman, James Bowman, made much of the penalties that could be imposed under the order for persistent and continued absenteeism, and Arthur Horner attributed the fall in production to the declining labour force, due, he said, to miners seeking better wages and conditions elsewhere. The next day the conference adjourned to allow the executive committee to impress on the government the urgency of its consent to the three points. It met Oliver Lyttelton, president of the Board of Trade, who made no concessions except to say that the owners were willing to negotiate on pay, but the government regarded it 'as a matter of vital importance that the miners' representatives should today recommend the acceptance of the Essential Work Order'. On its return to the conference with this message, the executive recommended that it should record its protest, but, 'in view of the serious work situation', should empower the executive 'to examine, seek to amend and apply the Order'. This proposal was carried by 370,000 votes to 194,000.<sup>143</sup> It was the subsequent negotiations with the owners that led to an attendance bonus of 5p a day for adult miners and 2½p for others on 6 June 1941,<sup>144</sup> subsequently converted into a flat-rate increase.

Up to 1943 the record of manpower planning had been a story of success. The annual exchange of insurance books provided the planners with information on the distribution of employed workers. The Registration for Employment Order of March 1941 supplied information on the availability of additional sources of manpower. The Essential Works Order provided for men and women to be directed where they were most needed. The Schedule of Reserved Occupations and the Register of Protected Establishments prevented the services from depleting industry's skilled manpower. The demands of the services for manpower and equipment gave the planners information concerning the demands for manpower that they were expected to meet, although they could, and did, argue that these must be scaled down. However, in September 1943 the 'peak of mobilisation' was reached. 'The days in which production requirements had determined distribution of labour were passed: in future programmes would have to be trimmed to the available supply of workers.'<sup>145</sup>

The armed services continued to expand, reaching their peak on D-Day in 1944. Civilian employment therefore had to decline;<sup>146</sup> but there were areas of priority also in civilian employment, among which coalmining stood at the top of the list. Coal was essential to industrial

<sup>143</sup> Arnot, 318.

<sup>144</sup> See above.

<sup>145</sup> Parker, 200.

<sup>146</sup> To some extent this decline was offset by the employment of prisoners of war. Italian prisoners were first employed, mainly in agriculture, in 1941. Their numbers increased in subsequent years, and some German prisoners were also employed.

production, to the services, and to the civilian population. Output fell year by year, from 228,400 tons in 1939-40 to 201,600 tons in 1942-3. In 1943-4 the decline accelerated sharply, and the figure for the year was down to 188,900 tons.<sup>147</sup> The cause was in part a decline in the number of miners, from 757,500 in mid-1939 to 714,400 in mid-1943,<sup>148</sup> and also the rising average age of the labour force. The proportion of miners aged 19-25 fell from 18.5 per cent in 1937 to 14.6 per cent in 1942,<sup>149</sup> and the problem of absenteeism also attracted a good deal of attention.<sup>150</sup>

In April 1942 men aged under 25 years when they registered under the National Service Acts were given the option of transferring to underground work in coalmining, and in September the Essential Work Order for coalmining was amended to make absenteeism, persistent lateness, and indiscipline into offences for which a miner could be prosecuted under Defence Regulations. Up to the end of the year over 1,000 'optants' joined the industry; but absenteeism showed no decline. Far more effective was the drive to secure the return of experienced coalminers from other industries and the release from the services of some men with experience of work at the coalface, which together provided about 23,000 miners.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless the decline in output continued. In July 1943 the upper age limit of 25 for opting for coalmining by men awaiting call-up to the armed forces was dropped. A publicity campaign for 30,000 volunteers for underground mining was launched in August. Bevin broadcast an appeal. Headmasters were asked to impress on school-leavers the importance to the war effort of service in coalmining.

Acknowledging the failure of all these endeavours, Bevin announced on 2 December 1943 that a proportion of the men aged 18-25 available for call-up to the forces would be selected by ballot for direction to underground coalmining. Training centres were opened, to which the 'ballotees' were sent for training prior to allocation to a pit. They were entitled to appeal, and up to 40 per cent of those chosen in any ballot did so. The main grounds of appeal were preference for the forces, which was consistently rejected, and medical unfitness, which led to a second

<sup>147</sup> Court, table 6.

<sup>148</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for the Years 1939-1946*, app. 9.

<sup>149</sup> Court, 298.

<sup>150</sup> The measurement of absenteeism requires the number of shifts worked to be compared with the number of 'possible shifts'. The latter figure was increased during the war by agreements to, among other things, increase overtime and weekend shifts, and to terminate the practice of summer short-time in Midlands districts. Consequently while the number of shifts worked per miner rose considerably during the war, 'possible shifts' increased even more, and, with them, also absenteeism (Court, 112-13).

<sup>151</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for the Years 1939-1946*, 75.



medical examination. Those who refused to comply were brought before the courts. If they changed their minds, they were released to report to their training centres. Otherwise they were sentenced to prison, from which they were released if they recanted. If, after two periods of imprisonment, they still refused to comply, they were called up for the forces, or, if medically unfit, directed to industry. Up to the end of 1944 there were 500 prosecutions and 143 ballotees were sentenced to prison. 'During the life of the scheme, which was wound up at the end of the European war, 21,800 were allocated by ballot to coal-mining.'<sup>152</sup> Only between 6,000 and 7,000 of them were employed at the coalface,<sup>153</sup> but the jobs undertaken by the rest allowed more experienced workers to be upgraded to the face.

Coming unwillingly, many Bevin boys brought a strong aversion to the work and the life of the pits and a determination to quit both as soon as they were able; some were among the habitual absentees from work, discontented and unsatisfactory workers. These facts, taken together with the large number of men sent back to coal-mining from other industries and from the Forces, have an important bearing on the state of discipline and morale in the industry at the end of the war.<sup>154</sup>

### *Joint Production Committees*

The government had honoured Chamberlain's pledge that departments would consult with trade unions on industrial matters, and would appoint adequate trade union representation to advisory committees. Besides the National Joint Advisory Council and its Joint Consultative Committee, there was the Central Production Advisory Committee, also under Bevin's chairmanship (as chairman of the Cabinet's Production Executive), which took over the functions of the Ministry of Supply's Trade Union Advisory Committee in July 1941, and was in turn superseded by the National Production Advisory Council under the chairmanship of the Minister of Production, Oliver Lyttleton, in 1942. There was an Engineering Advisory Panel, and joint committees in chemicals, iron and steel, and shipbuilding. Trade union representatives also sat, with employers, on regional boards.

The Advisory Committee to the Ministry of Food played a central part in decisions of the ministry, especially in deciding which categories of workers should be entitled to supplementary food rations, including extra tea rations for occupations such as miners and railwaymen who did not have their tea supplied by canteens. By 1941 the committee had become the Rationing and Prices Committee. In 1942 it was settling

<sup>152</sup> Parker, 255.

<sup>153</sup> Court, 305.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 306.

applications for extra clothing for classes of workers who experienced unusual wear and tear; and in this context it gave advice to the president of the Board of Trade, Hugh Dalton. In 1943 its advice was also sought, again by the Board of Trade, on the distribution of supplies of alarm clocks and Thermos flasks. The committee proved most useful to the government in bearing the burden of a large number of potentially invidious decisions.

All these consultative bodies, however, operated at national or regional level. Following the Shipbuilding Essential Work Order in March 1941, the shipbuilding unions wanted an executive share in the organization set up to control shipyard labour. This was refused but central and local consultative committees were established, consisting of union and employer representatives along with officials of the Ministry of Labour and the Admiralty, which 'were consulted on a wide range of subjects such as dilution, transport and travel allowances, publicity, personnel management, training and apprenticeship'.<sup>155</sup> Yard committees were also established whose function was to serve as part of the machinery for dealing with absenteeism, persistent lateness, and indiscipline. Subsequently absentee committees were also established in the engineering industry.

Two trade union leaders, Dukes of the General and Municipal Workers and Tanner of the Engineers, spoke at their annual conferences in June 1941 about the need for more and better consultation. The motives of the two men, however, were somewhat different. Dukes was speaking about the discontent aroused by failure to consult over a government fire-watching order. The responsible minister was the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, and Dukes won a great round of applause when he said that such a failure could not be permitted whoever was in the government—'We are dealing with Government and Departments and not with personalities.' The resolution passed by the conference insisted on continuous consultation between government and unions. The only reference to factory consultation came from an official of the union's Southern district, who told the conference that the men's representatives at Woolwich Arsenal had been able to counter charges of absenteeism by management with evidence of the large volume of 'waiting-time of pieceworkers' and other examples of mismanagement; and 'we succeeded in persuading management to set up a joint Committee of Production at Woolwich', with regular meetings and power to summon witnesses. Tanner's aim was much the same as that of the Woolwich shop stewards. He attacked 'mismanagement, gross inefficiency and incompetence in industry', aggravated by cost-

<sup>155</sup> Inman, 106.

plus accounting.<sup>156</sup> On 21 June 1941 the minutes of the management board of the Engineering Employers' Federation recorded an allegation that Tanner had made 'serious charges of mismanagement and had been invited by the Government Committee on National Expenditure to give chapter and verse'. As a result his union's research department conducted 'an inquiry into the state of munitions production throughout Britain ... based on reports straight from the workshop by shop stewards, branch officers and district committeemen' which led the union to propose to the government and to the engineering employers that 'Joint Production Committees should be established in every factory'.<sup>157</sup>

These two speeches were made just before Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, which brought a total volte-face by the Communist Party. What had previously been an 'imperialist war' became overnight 'a war to defend the Socialist Fatherland'. The Aircraft Shop Stewards' National Council had now become the Engineering and Allied Shop Stewards' National Council, still with Peter Zinkin as editor of its journal, which continued under the title of the *New Propeller*. The council promptly called a conference on production in London on 23 August, at which the chairman reported: 'An entirely new development in British industry is taking place. Hundreds of meetings of workers have been held, pledging solidarity to the Soviet Union, and also pledging themselves to do everything in order to help here in production.'<sup>158</sup> In October the *New Propeller* reported that 'Conferences of shop stewards and workers' representatives that have been held in most parts of the country have had some effect on increasing the production of arms. At Napier's a 'Joint Production Committee, to be known as the "Works Manager's Joint Consultative Committee" is the first and most important achievement to be registered by Napier Shop Stewards in the campaign for increased production and efficiency'. These developments would not have pleased Dukes, whose attitude to shop stewards can be divined from his speech at his union's annual conference in 1942, on a motion asking for payment of shop stewards whose duties caused them to lose money if they were on piece-work.

Shop stewards ... are not always an unmixed blessing, and those of us who have been handling this problem in the set-up of Production Committees for the TUC have had to move very carefully. As a matter of fact we have taken the view that the experiment must be limited to one industry. I am very apprehensive when I hear statements which reveal that shop stewards can negotiate inside while organisers are precluded.

<sup>156</sup> Jefferys, 253.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* 253-4.

<sup>158</sup> *New Propeller* (Sept. 1941).

On 28 August 1941 the management board of the Engineering Employers' Federation noted that the question of greater consultation in industrial establishments was to be considered by the Engineering Joint Advisory Council to the Ministry of Labour. By this time they had conducted a survey of member firms. Just over 1,000 had replied, of which rather more than half had no works committees. Of the firms with works committees, 190 reported that their committees were confined to 'questions of welfare such as canteens, travelling facilities, safety first, ARP and benevolent funds', whereas at 253 firms the committees included working conditions along with welfare among their functions. The majority of the remaining 569 firms, which had no works committees, 'had proved by experience that contact with their individual employees or through the medium of shop stewards was so successful as to make a works committee unnecessary'. The board therefore concluded that 'the question could best be settled by the firms themselves', and that its officers 'should avoid giving the Minister at this stage any assurance of action by the Federation in the matter'. On 25 September it decided to advise member firms that if they were approached by their shop stewards on the subject of a joint production committee they should 'endeavour to establish such organised contact as would create a better understanding of the problems of the factory and let the workpeople feel that their goodwill was welcome'.

However, support was gathering for a more positive approach to joint production committees. In July 1941 Lord McGowan, chairman of ICI, had written to Churchill on the subject of joint works committees, of which his firm had some years' experience, expressing 'agreement with the idea of joint committees', and saying that 'the old shibboleth of "managerial functions" was perhaps inappropriate to a total war'.<sup>159</sup> In September 1941 both sides of the Midland regional board 'agreed unanimously that it was desirable that machinery should be set up in all works for the mutual interchange of information on production questions'.<sup>160</sup> On 19 October a conference of 1,237 delegates from over 300 factories met in London to pool their complaints of inefficient production, and 'many of them recommended JPCs as the answer'.<sup>161</sup> Beaverbrook, the Minister of Aircraft Production, took a hand. Shop stewards at an aircraft firm where a joint committee had already been established wrote to ask him whether joint committees ought not to be set up in similar factories. His reply was printed in the January 1942 issue of *New Propeller*: 'The Government welcomes any opportunity that can be taken by employers and employees to set up bodies which, in a

<sup>159</sup> Inman, 378.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Richard Croucher, *Engineers at War* (London: Merlin Press, 1982), 152.



spirit of co-operation, will discuss matters of mutual interest to both sides with a view to the furtherance of the war effort.' There were still some hesitations on the trade union side. On 4 November the executive committee of the General and Municipal Workers

endorsed the view that no support could be given to any form of machinery in the workshops which would usurp the functions of the Trade Unions and they made it clear that there would be no deviation from the policy . . . concerning the retention of existing methods of wage negotiation. They felt they could approve the appointment of Shop Stewards or Works Committees as outlined by the General Secretary on the condition that they were appointed for the sole purpose of stimulating production and would not interfere with the functions of the unions.

By the end of 1941 the attitude of the engineering employers was beginning to soften, and in December they met the executive council of the Engineers to discuss methods of increasing and improving production, and the 'need for consultation'. They told the union that they agreed 'in principle', but would come back to them.<sup>162</sup> Next the General Council of Congress intervened. On 7 January 1942 it held a conference of representatives of the engineering unions which set up a subcommittee, chaired by Dukes, 'to devise machinery that would facilitate production and to report back'. This they did on 5 February, proposing that the trade union side of 'Works Production Committees' should be elected by 'the workers in the establishments' from candidates nominated by the unions with members there; that committees should be made compulsory under the Essential Work Order; that the committees should not deal with matters for which the unions were responsible; and that the election and work of the committees should be supervised by joint trades union district production committees. It was evident that Dukes's subcommittee was anxious that the factory committees should not get out of hand. On 5 February the conference reconvened to approve these proposals. It then decided to approach the British Employers' Confederation.<sup>163</sup> But the confederation, advised by the engineering employers' management board, replied that it was a matter for individual industries to settle.<sup>164</sup>

The proposal that the formation of the committees should be obligatory went to the Joint Consultative Committee on 30 March 1942 where the employers' side was 'strongly opposed', holding that 'no system of Production Advisory Committees imposed by Order would work satisfactorily'; and Bevin said that the 'normal practice' for adapting the Essential Work Order in relation to an individual industry

<sup>162</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (Jan. 1942).

<sup>163</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1942), 84-5.

<sup>164</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, *Management Board Minutes* (26 Feb. 1942).

'would be for both sides of the industry to make the request'.<sup>165</sup> By this time, however, following an agreement in February to set up joint production committees in the Royal Ordnance Factories, the engineering employers' Management Board had on 26 February decided the terms on which it was willing to settle; and an agreement with the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions was signed on 13 March. The General Council decided to leave aside the proposal for compulsion.

The engineering agreement provided for 'Joint Production Consultative Advisory Committees', whose 'object' was to be 'the regular exchange of views between Management and Workers on matters relating to the improvement of production, to increase efficiency for this purpose and to make recommendations thereon'. They were not to discuss wages or other matters regulated by agreements with the unions. Management representatives were to be appointed and workers' representatives were to be adult organized workers (that is trade-unionists) elected by ballot, with no more than ten on either side. There were to be joint secretaries, but the chairman was to be a manager. Meetings were to be monthly and workers' representatives were to be paid for attendance, at their time-rates, including national bonus. The agreement was to terminate at the end of the war, unless the parties agreed that it should continue. In May 1942 the *New Propeller* reported 'Election Fever in the Works' as ballots were held to choose the workers' representatives.

There were attempts to revise the constitution of the committees. The Draughtsmen wanted to be represented on them, and the manual unions supported their claim, but it was rejected by the engineering employers on 30 July, except when draughtsmen were co-opted 'in a consultative capacity'. The Clerical and Administrative Workers also claimed representation, with the backing of Stafford Cripps,<sup>166</sup> who had succeeded Beaverbrook, after a brief interregnum, as Minister of Aircraft Production; and on 25 November 1943 the management board of the Engineering Employers' Federation considered a proposal from the Engineering Joint Trades Movement that representatives of the staff should be included in the committees,<sup>167</sup> along with a second proposal, that payment for time lost by attendance at meetings should be at the rate of the individual member's average earnings instead of his or her time-rate. It rejected the first, but decided to investigate current practice in relation to payment for time lost by meetings. Having discovered that

<sup>165</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1942), 85.

<sup>166</sup> Hughes, 124.  
<sup>167</sup> It was supported in this by the General Council (Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1943), 109).

average earnings was rarely paid for time lost in this way, on 4 January 1944 it turned that down too.

What was to be done if the two sides of a committee could not agree on an issue? The engineering employers thought that this must be accepted as inevitable in a consultative body when one side could not persuade the other, but the unions wanted a right of appeal to some body outside the firm. In the end the employers on the National Production Advisory Council agreed with their trade union colleagues that disagreements should be referred to the regional boards provided both sides of the joint production committee were willing.

A more difficult case was where the two sides . . . disagreed [over a reference to the regional board], and after considerable discussion it was decided that in those circumstances both sides should be asked to sign a formal remit to the Regional Board without the dissentient side committing itself to the substance of the complaint, and that if the dissentient side refused to sign a formal remit, the other side, which is practically always the Trade Union side, should then be free to bring the matter to the attention of the Regional Board concerned through normal Trade Union channels.<sup>168</sup>

As it turned out, these complicated arrangements were not of great value to the unions, because when issues were referred to the regional boards there was in many cases little that the boards could do other than refer them back for further discussion at the individual firm, 'and this discouraged the workers' side from using this channel of appeal'.<sup>169</sup>

However, the methods of Cripps, the hero of the Left, differed from those of his press-baron predecessor. Not only did he deprecate the previous practice of the department in submitting inflated labour requirements to the Ministry of Labour, when he 'gently hinted in December 1942 that his department had protested too much, and . . . urged the merits of co-operation as compared with a fighting approach',<sup>170</sup> but, in addition,

no single factor had greater influence on personnel management in the aircraft industry than the appointment of Sir Stafford; and his encouragement of joint consultation between employers and workers is well known. For example . . . the Minister declared in a broadcast speech . . . that 'I am most anxious that they [joint production committees] should function fully and properly in every factory that comes under my Department. Where this was not happening workers should get their trade union to see to it at once.'<sup>171</sup>

Cripps also told the engineering employers that he wanted to see the minutes of joint production committees of all the factories working for

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* 103.

<sup>169</sup> Inman, 382.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* 189.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* 230.

his department. The management board replied that he could see the minutes of the shadow factory committees 'in view of the propriety rights of the Ministry of Aircraft Production in these factories', but not those of committees in private firms.<sup>172</sup>

Meanwhile the General Council of Congress was trying to find a job for its trades union district production committees (the prefix 'joint' had now been dropped from their title, presumably because they were not joint in the sense of including both management and union representatives), but it was told that it had no jurisdiction over the yard committees in shipbuilding, which had been empowered to take on the role of joint consultative committees in the shipyards, or over the committees in the Royal Ordnance Factories, which came under the supervision of the Ministry of Supply's joint central production committee. The General Council made 'strenuous efforts . . . to secure recognition of these committees' by the engineering employers, 'who took the view that the functions of Joint Works Production Committees were largely domestic in character, and it was unnecessary to superimpose this district machinery on the existing machinery'.<sup>173</sup> The original agreement made no provision for the periodic re-election of the workers' representatives on the joint production committees, and in March 1944 the unions proposed that there should be annual elections. The engineering employers preferred elections to be held every two years. Eventually they compromised on electing half the committees every year, with half the current representatives to retire on 31 December 1944 and the other half on 30 June 1945. From 30 June 1946 onwards half were to retire in June each year. This amendment was signed on 19 December 1944. One further amendment, a minor change in the rules of eligibility to stand for election, was made in February 1945.

There were also discussions during the war on revisions of the agreement on shop stewards in the engineering industry. At the end of 1942 the Engineers asked that convenors of stewards be recognized. The employers' management board discussed the request on 28 January 1943, when 'Several members of the Board . . . expressed the view that in certain circumstances it is to the advantage of management for the convenor to be recognised on a domestic basis, provided the proper type of man is appointed.' It decided that recognition should not be conceded by a national agreement, but there should be no restriction on recognition by individual firms. At its meeting on 28 October 1943 the management board had before it a proposal from the Engineers that

<sup>172</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, *Management Board Minutes* (27 May 1943).

<sup>173</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1943), 109.



shop stewards have the right to object to further dilution 'when it can be established that a class of labour suitable for upgrading is available within the particular establishment'; and a letter from Citrine asking that 'fresh labour should not be introduced into a works without prior consultation of the Joint Production Committee'. Both were rejected, although some members of the board considered that 'in some instances the advice of Joint Production Committees would be of value'. Another proposal from the unions was that accredited shop stewards have the right to hold meetings of their members at the place of work. On 27 April 1944 the Management Board said there might be occasions 'when it would be unreasonable for a federated firm to refuse', but could not admit a general right. By contrast, on 30 December 1941 the board considered a request from its Scottish regional committee to be relieved of the obligation to recognize as shop stewards those who 'take part in subversive activities and disregard the provisions for avoiding disputes or in any way encourage a breach of agreement'. The director undertook to discuss the matter with the Engineers, and, not surprisingly, no more was heard of it.

The outstanding feature of the development of work-place trade-unionism in the engineering and kindred industries during the war was a growth in the number of shop stewards and works committees. There are no figures to prove it, for the practice of surveying work-place relations developed only after the war. If, however, the number of shop stewards kept pace with the number of trade union members in the metals-and-engineering group of industries between 1939 and 1943 (the peak year of the war), it would have almost doubled.<sup>174</sup> One indication of the development of industrial relations in these industries during the war is the increase of the number of firms in membership of the Engineering Employers' Federation from 2,023 in 1939 to 3,571 in 1945.<sup>175</sup> All the new members would be placed under an obligation to recognize shop stewards if they had not done so before.

What were the consequences of these changes in work-place industrial relations? The only feature that was studied at the time was the work and effect of joint production committees. There was a survey by the Engineers at the end of 1942,<sup>176</sup> and surveys by the Engineering Employers' Federation<sup>177</sup> and the Ministry of Aircraft Production in 1943.<sup>178</sup> The International Labour Office used these in its report on *British Joint Production Machinery* in 1944; and there is more material available in the unpublished 'Mass Observation Archive' at the University of Sussex Library. Both Inman and Croucher used most of

<sup>174</sup> Trade union membership rose from 993,700 in 1939 to 1,970,300 in 1943 (Bain and Price, 50).

<sup>176</sup> Croucher, 155.

<sup>177</sup> Inman, 385.

<sup>175</sup> Wigham, 304.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 383.

these sources in their assessments of the joint production committees, but only Croucher used the Mass Observation Archive. In December 1943 there were nearly 4,500 joint production or similar committees known to the regional boards in private firms in the engineering and allied industries. In addition there were joint production committees in forty Royal Ordnance Factories and in the great majority of shipbuilding and repairing firms employing more than sixty workers.<sup>179</sup> However, Croucher cautions that the 4,500 committees in the engineering and allied industries included all types of consultative committees (including works councils) 'and a committee did not have to have met more than once to qualify for inclusion. He adds the further qualification that 'many of the JPCs met only once and then effectively ceased to operate, [so] it appears that country-wide coverage may well have been achieved during 1942 rather than later in the war when many committees existed only on paper'.<sup>180</sup>

The engineering agreement gave an 'illustrative' list of questions appropriate for discussion at such committee meetings. They were 'maximum utilisation of existing machinery; upkeep of fixtures, jigs, tools and gauges; improvement in methods of production; efficient use of the maximum number of productive hours; elimination of defective work and waste; efficient use of material supplies and efficient use of safety precautions and devices'. One topic not specifically included, but implied by 'the efficient use of the maximum number of working hours' was absenteeism. Inman reports that

Both government departments and the trade unions believed that to use the Joint Production Committees to discuss individual cases of absenteeism would prejudice their success from the start. . . . More satisfactory was the practice adopted by some Yard Committees and many Joint Production Committees . . . of delegating the question of discipline to a sub-committee.<sup>181</sup>

Two topics not mentioned in the list were pay, which was specifically excluded, and welfare. Welfare, however, seems to have taken up most of the time of the committees that was not spent on matters in the recommended list. The Ministry of Aircraft Production's inquiry found that '63.5 per cent of the committees' time was taken up by technical and production questions, while 27.4 per cent was taken up by welfare matters';<sup>182</sup> and suggested that if there were welfare issues that were of concern to the workers in the plant production might well be assisted by settling them. As for the excluded topic of wages, Inman alleges that it was 'also raised directly or indirectly on many Committees in view of the close connection between wages and production'. She quotes the

<sup>179</sup> Inman, 308-1.

<sup>181</sup> Inman, 384.

<sup>180</sup> Croucher, 155.

<sup>182</sup> Croucher, 156.

Engineers as saying that where wage issues 'had been recognised as a stumbling block to production and placed on the agenda, encouraging results have been achieved'.<sup>183</sup>

The chief factor making for a successful joint production committee was chairmanship. A technically qualified chairman, with the skills needed to run a committee, and endowed with sufficient authority to enable the committee to come to decisions, was the ideal.<sup>184</sup> Another aid to success, at least in the beginning, was the strength of the Communist Party among the shop stewards in a number of factories. The party was enthusiastically in favour of the committees.

There were also adverse factors. Some shop stewards, especially those with the old craft 'ASE mentality' were hostile to the committees.<sup>185</sup> This, for example, affected some Royal Ordnance Factories. Because of shop-steward opposition, no committee was established at the Enfield Royal Ordnance Factory at all, and it was not until 1945 that one was set up at the Leeds factory.<sup>186</sup> Foremen were more hostile to the committees than were senior managers, because their authority might be undermined. Where shop stewards gave their support to the committees, their members might accuse them of neglecting the interests of the workers. This was especially likely with Communist shop stewards, who had been preaching the class struggle until recently, arguing that the only thing that management understood was a strike, and had now become enthusiasts for what might be called, in Marxist terminology, 'class collaboration'. This reaction could undermine the effect of Communist support for the committees. But 'opposition from the Shop Stewards was fatal to the success of a Joint Production Committee'.<sup>187</sup> Croucher provides the best summary: 'The actual content and texture of relationships . . . were elusive even to knowledgeable contemporary commentators. The guarded comments made about the relevance or otherwise of the committees tended to be characterised by uncertainty and ambivalence. All of them laid some emphasis on the difficulties experienced in involving people on the shop floor.'<sup>188</sup> However, it does not follow that Inman is wrong in concluding that 'by 1945 . . . there was greater understanding on the part of workers of the problems of management and by the management of the problems of the workers than had existed in the previous fifty years'<sup>189</sup>—so long as this is taken to refer only to 'some workers' and 'some managements', or even

<sup>183</sup> Inman, 383.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* 384.

<sup>185</sup> Croucher, 169. The ASE was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the craft-conscious predecessor of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. A parallel in the shipyards was 'the unwillingness of the separate trades to co-operate with each other and the fear that the Yard Committees would interfere in questions like dilution, which individual unions regarded as their own prerogative' (Inman, 381).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* 392.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* 388.

<sup>188</sup> Croucher, 156.

<sup>189</sup> Inman, 389.

perhaps 'many workers' and 'many managements', but not 'all' or 'most'.

One other major industry had established production committees on similar lines. Pit production committees were set up in coalmining in the summer of 1940 'to deal with absenteeism and every other question affecting pit production'.<sup>190</sup> Many of them had lapsed by the following year when they were revived and given new authority under the Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order of 15 May 1941. As in other industries the order made persistent absentees subject to the discipline of the national service officer, but an amendment made in December gave the pit production committees the right to report offenders to the national service officer, constituting them as part of the statutory disciplinary machinery. However, this task 'was intensely disliked by the miner members of the Committees' and 'took up much time and energy which might have been better spent in other directions'.<sup>191</sup> It also had the effect of 'minimising the production side of their work'.<sup>192</sup>

Consequently, when the Ministry of Fuel and Power was set up in June 1942, the decision was taken to switch the emphasis from absenteeism to production. The responsibility for reporting absentees was transferred to regional investigation officers, and the committees were charged with 'discussing and increasing output'. The ministry set up a Pit Relations Branch to assist and guide them. A constitution was drawn up, along with a model agenda and a report form. Nevertheless there were still problems, many of them akin to those of the joint production committees in the munitions industries.

The colliery manager is a technical expert and inclined to be sceptical, often with justification, of any suggestion of a technical nature from men who do not possess the same experience and training. The men's representatives, in most cases, were only familiar with their own district in the pit, whereas the manager had a bird's-eye view of the whole. Through no fault of their own, the men sometimes showed an inadequate and narrow knowledge of the workings. The effects of a conflict were twofold. The meeting developed into a battle of words with management and workmen ranged on either side, or the management blinded their critics with a flow of technical jargon. The men developed a sense of frustration which proceeded into apathy, and the committees became one-man sessions performed by the chairman.<sup>193</sup>

As in joint production committees, the men's representatives on pit production committees, who were almost all lodge officials (the nearest equivalent to shop stewards in the Miners' Federation), 'were troubled by conflicting loyalties'.<sup>194</sup> There was no possibility of reporting to the workers at meetings in the canteens during or immediately after work as in the munitions industries, and it was almost impossible to persuade

<sup>190</sup> Court, 131.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* 321.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* 210.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*



miners to return to their collieries in the evenings to hear reports, or even to elect the committees, which 'tended to be regarded either with suspicion or apathy' by the men.<sup>195</sup> Court concludes his account of the pit production committees with the 'verdict given by those who had a bird's-eye view from headquarters of the work done by the committees'. Their view was that the committees 'were not generally successful in fulfilling the purpose for which they had been created. For every committee which worked properly there were many that did not function at all, or else were ineffective'.<sup>196</sup>

The creation and operation of worker-management production committees constituted a considerable effort to harness the enthusiasm, knowledge, and experience of working men and women to increase output in order to hasten victory. Almost certainly the knowledge that it was being done gave satisfaction to politicians, civil servants in the relevant ministries, trade union officials, many managers and workers' representatives in the factories and mines, and perhaps also to the general public. Moreover it seemed such a good idea that it had to be tried. However, the extent to which output was actually increased by the committees is debatable.

### *Strikes, the Left, and the Law*

Table 1 sets out some statistical data relating to strikes in the war years, together with comparable data for the First World War. The years 1914, 1939, and 1945 are excluded, because each of them comprised several months of peace, but 1918 is included because the armistice was not signed until November. The table reveals a marked contrast in the contribution of the coalmining industry to British strike losses from one war to the next. In 1915-18 coalmining accounted for one-seventh of British strikes, and for just over a quarter of the working days lost through strikes. In 1940-4 the proportion of strikes contributed by coalmining was almost a half and its share of working days lost was just over a half. An assessment of strikes in the Second World War, therefore, has to start with coalmining. In 1940, according to the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (May 1941),

only two disputes involved more than 5,000 workpeople. One of these occurred in January when 26,000 colliery workpeople in Lanarkshire and parts of Dumbartonshire and West Lothian were idle for one day in sympathy with the employees in a single colliery. The other arose out of dissatisfaction of colliery workpeople in Yorkshire with arrangements for a war addition to wages, and with the effect on wages of the monthly ascertainment of proceeds; about

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* 322.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

TABLE I. *Strikes in wartime: number of stoppages and aggregate number of working days lost, 1915-1918 and 1940-1944*

Year	All industries and services		Non-coalmining		Coalmining	
	No of stoppages	Working days lost (000s)	No. of stoppages	Working days lost (000s)	No. of stoppages	Working days lost (000s)
1915	672	2,953	593	1,312	79	1,641
1916	582	2,446	465	2,135	67	311
1917	730	5,647	602	4,476	128	1,171
1918	1,165	5,879	1,018	4,710	147	1,165
1940	922	940	541	435	381	505
1941	1,251	1,079	781	744	470	335
1942	1,303	1,527	777	687	526	840
1943	1,785	1,808	942	918	843	2,480
1944	2,194	3,714	941	1,234	1,253	2,480

Source: C. T. B. Smith *et al.*, *Strikes in Britain: A Research Study of Industrial Stoppages in the United Kingdom*, Manpower Papers 15 (London: Department of Employment, 1978).

130,000 days were lost in the latter part of February and the beginning of March by the 20,000 workpeople involved.

The following year, says Court, was the 'most peaceful' in the coalfields 'for some years', although 'the most contentious district that year was Scotland, where the Lanarkshire field managed to have disputes in forty-nine of the fifty-two weeks in the year'.<sup>197</sup>

The number of working days lost through strikes in coalmining rose sharply in the first half of 1942, but fell back later in the year after the wage increases granted by the Greene award,<sup>198</sup> lending credence to Court's claim that the chief grievance of the miners at this time was 'the level of wages, compared with those of other industries'. Next to wages he ranks 'the Essential Work Order, and the method of dealing with absenteeism under that Order, until it was amended . . . in the summer of 1942',<sup>199</sup> thus providing a second reason for the decline of strike losses in coalmining in the second half of the year. The respite from industrial unrest following the Porter award and the amendment of the Essential Work Order lasted through the first half of 1943, but strike losses began to mount again in the summer, making the total loss of working days through strikes in coalmining that year the highest of the war so far. These strikes led to the appointment of the Porter tribunal, whose award at the beginning of 1944 provoked the largest strikes of the war (described above), and the one substantial coalmining strike of 1945.

There is no reason to doubt that the main cause of the exceptional proneness of the industry to strike during the war—exceptional even taking into account that coalmining has traditionally been the most strike-prone of British industries—is that, as the miners themselves constantly asserted, they were badly paid in relation to other industries—so long as it is granted that miners had long memories. In 1906 their earnings had been well ahead of those in other industries.<sup>200</sup> They were still ahead in 1920, but the depression of 1921–2 brought their average earnings down 'by almost a half between the last quarter of 1920 and the last quarter of 1922'.<sup>201</sup> Relative decline continued after the 1926 lockout up to 1931 when earnings in coalmining were worth less than they had been in 1906 and their decline had been far greater than that of workers in other industries. Workers in most other industries had gained considerably compared with 1906.<sup>202</sup> During the thirties the miners managed to recover very little, if any, of the ground that they had lost. When they complained during the war that they were badly paid in relation to workers in other industries, they were looking back to a

<sup>197</sup> Court, 124.

<sup>200</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 480.

<sup>198</sup> See pp. 187–8.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* 325.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* 561.

golden age before 1921. Coalowners, civil servants, and government ministers, on the other hand, making comparisons with the thirties, may have formed the impression that the miners were doing relatively well. Historically the coalminers had a powerful case. Their pay had always fluctuated more widely than that of most other workers, in step with the wide fluctuations in the demand for coal generated by the trade cycle. In earlier years a shortage of coal such as existed in 1943 would have placed miners at the top of the industrial earnings league. If they did not recover what they regarded as their rightful position at that time, when would they be able to do so? There might be an economic depression after the war, as there had been in 1921, which would set coal prices tumbling again.

Outside coalmining, the main losses of working days through strikes occurred in the shipbuilding and engineering industries. The first substantial strike in engineering followed the submission of a wage-claim by apprentices in Scotland. The Scottish engineering apprentices had taken the lead in the 1937 strike which had secured them a wage increase and a procedure for presenting their grievances to the engineering employers.<sup>203</sup> In May 1939 2,000 of them had struck again, demanding that compulsory military service be counted as part of the period required for their apprenticeship, and seeking further improvements in pay and conditions; but their unions had persuaded them to return to work. However, war conditions aggravated their grievances when they discovered that dilutees 'were receiving higher wages than fourth and fifth year apprentices, who were often required to set up the machines of their less-skilled and better-paid fellow workers'.<sup>204</sup> The Engineers' executive council agreed to take up their case, but little progress was made, and the apprentices' committee in Scotland decided to act for itself. It submitted a claim for a national scale with half the skilled rate at age 16 rising to the full skilled rate at 21.

However, the procedure agreement for apprentices, boys, and youths signed on 30 June 1943 provided for the union executives to negotiate with the employers on behalf of these grades and the employers refused to deal with the apprentices' representatives. At the end of February 1941 a strike began on the Clyde. Soon 6,000 apprentices were out in the west of Scotland. A court of inquiry was appointed and began to take evidence, but was adjourned to allow further negotiations. Meanwhile, delegates from the Clyde had brought out apprentices in several centres in Lancashire, including Barrow, and in Belfast, until 25,000 were on strike. The negotiations brought agreement on 21 March, providing for a scale related to the skilled rate, as the apprentices were seeking, but

<sup>203</sup> See Ch. 2.

<sup>204</sup> Parker, 459.



rising only to 55 per cent of that rate at 20 years of age.<sup>205</sup> Some of the Lancashire apprentices had not yet returned to work, and they now succeeded in persuading others to come out again; and some London apprentices struck for the first time. 'The government took a grave view of the situation and the Minister of Labour decided that 1,100 who were of call-up age should be issued with notices to report for medical examination. The union was doubtful of the wisdom of this move, but in fact it served its purpose. By 12th April all the apprentices had returned to work.'<sup>206</sup> Bevin also used his powers under Order 1305. On 8 April six 'ringleaders' of the Lancashire strike 'were bound over for twelve months on the sum of £5 each at Manchester'.<sup>207</sup> Parker's verdict is that the strike, which cost 220,000 working days, might have been avoided, or at least restricted, 'if the urgency of reaching a settlement had been recognised by the appropriate negotiating authorities—the employers' federation and the AEU'.

The biggest engineering strike in the following year, 1942, was in Belfast for the reinstatement of two shop stewards who had been dismissed—a not uncommon cause of industrial conflict. Nine thousand workers struck and 120,000 working days were lost. A strike of shipbuilding workers on the Tyne in the same month, October, had a more unusual cause. The strikers were objecting to a change in the day of the week to which their pay was made up. Because of a shortage of clerical staff the firms were having difficulty in getting the paperwork done in time, and approached the Engineers and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions with a proposal to put back the day to which pay was made up to give their staffs more time. The change inevitably involved a 'short week' in the first week of operation, in which the pay-packets would be smaller than usual. The employers offered to make up each man's pay to his average earnings in that week, on condition that the money was repaid through deductions over the following five weeks. The union officials agreed, and letters were sent to the shop stewards to explain what had been arranged. The response was a barrage of protests from the union branches and the shipyards which was not appeased by an offer from the employers to allow repayment over twelve weeks. On 5 October the men struck in several of the yards. In all 20,000 men came out and 135,000 days were lost. A drift back to work started after a few days, and by 14 October the strike was over.

Award 326 of the National Arbitration Tribunal in March 1943 was followed by a rash of strikes over piece-work, the most protracted of them at the Vickers-Armstrong works which dominated the town of

<sup>205</sup> This figure was increased to 62.5 per cent in June 1943.

<sup>206</sup> Parker, 460.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.* 467.

Barrow, isolated on a promontory of the Cumbrian coast. Barrow was a trouble spot for the Engineers. In 1936–7 the executive council had been driven to impose several penalties on the district committee there to make it call off an overtime ban aimed at enforcing a closed shop on the firm.<sup>208</sup> At the beginning of 1941 the committee refused to operate the wartime agreement on the temporary relaxation of customs to permit dilution. To bring them to heel, the executive sent a national officer to Barrow, instructing him to take over the running of the district, along with the district secretary, ‘until the District Committee are prepared to reconstitute the Local Joint Committee and operate and give effect to the Provisions of the National Agreement and the Executive Council’s instructions’.<sup>209</sup>

The system of payment by results at Vickers was not ‘straight piecework’, but premium bonus. There are several varieties of premium bonus, but they all depend on fixing a time for each job, normally by ‘time study’, and paying the worker according to the time he ‘saves’. If his job, or series of repetitive jobs, is timed to take an hour, and he finishes it in half an hour, he is entitled to a bonus in addition to his hourly rate. Under the most generous system, the bonus would be half the hourly rate for the half-hour saved. The system therefore places a limit on the amount of bonus earned. It is impossible to earn a bonus of the full hourly rate. That would require the worker to save an hour during the hour worked, involving the completion of the job in no time at all. Other varieties of premium bonus differ by paying the worker for only a proportion of the ‘time saved’. Part of the saving may be kept to pay a bonus to ancillary workers, or kept by the firm. Vickers it seems,<sup>210</sup> was one of this latter group. So figures such as those bandied about in Coventry, of piece-work earnings of 100 per cent, 200 per cent, 300 per cent, and more, were outside the experience of premium-bonus workers.

Engineering workers believed that Award 326 had been intended to increase the pay of all of them, including piece-workers and workers on premium bonus. The award had both raised the percentage over the basic time-rate which the piece-work price or bonus time should enable ‘a workman of average ability’ to earn from 25 per cent to 27.5 per cent, and increased the basic time-rate by transferring £1 from the national bonus to his basic rate. However, the application of the award to these

<sup>208</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>209</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, Executive Council, (15 Jan. 1941).

<sup>210</sup> According to Croucher (pp. 219–20), in negotiations in May 1943 ‘the Vickers representatives made no concessions to the men’s demands that time-saved earnings should be paid in the proportion of 85 per cent to the worker and fifteen per cent to the company’. It follows that the previous division was even more favourable to the company.

workers was less straightforward than for time-workers. The 30p increase in the national bonus of time-workers henceforth appeared in the weekly pay-packets of time-workers, and the transfer of £1 from their national bonus to their basic time-rate enhanced the rates at which they were paid for overtime and weekend work, and other work paid at 'premium rates'. By contrast, it was possible for employers whose employees on piece-work or bonus were all earning well above 27.5 per cent over their new basic rates to take the view that they had no call to revise their bonus times or piece-work prices since the requirements of the award, namely to see that 'the worker of average ability' could earn 27.5 per cent over his basic time-rate, were already met. Accordingly, many such workers found that the award had made no difference to their pay-packets at all; and some showed resentment. All that the engineering employers would guarantee was that a worker on piece-work or bonus 'should not be prejudiced' by failure to 'consolidate' the transferred £1 of national bonus into his basic rate.

At its meeting on 17 April 1943 the Engineers' executive council received a letter from the engineering employers complaining of walk-outs at Barrow and Crayford, and overtime embargoes at Huddersfield, Rochdale, and Bradford, all in protest over the effects of Award 326. The executive sent a circular letter to all branches and districts, and to all divisional organizers, instructing them to see that normal working was resumed. On 20 April it learned of an unofficial mass meeting, and an 'alleged go-slow' at Barrow, also over Award 326. It sent a stern reprimand to the district committee. There followed a period of negotiation between the management and the men's representatives at Vickers. The latter demanded 'consolidation', in line with the policy of the executive council, which was that consolidation should be compulsory. The company refused, and later said that if there was to be consolidation, bonus times would have to be reduced to yield 27.5 per cent over the new basic rate of £3.30, which would entail reductions even in the relatively low earnings of many of its employees. The men's representatives then tried to avoid the whole subject of the award by asking for an increase in the worker's share of 'time saved'. The company refused.

In the end the men chose consolidation as the best issue on which to strike, presumably in the belief that the management would not dare to carry out its threat to reduce bonus times as a consequence. On 24 August the district committee gave twenty-one days' notice of a strike unless the company transferred the £1 from the national bonus to the basic rate. The executive council countermanded the strike notice, and informed the district committee that the National Arbitration Tribunal had been asked to interpret its award so as to settle a number of disputed



issues, including consolidation. When the district committee refused to comply with the executive instructions, the latter demanded written undertakings from its members, its secretary, and its president to abide by the union's rules and the decisions of the executive. The committee replied that the shop stewards had, on the authority of another mass meeting, taken over responsibility for the strike, which had now begun, and that they themselves 'were carrying out their ordinary duties for the union'.<sup>211</sup> The executive then sent a national organizer, George Crane, a Communist, to take over the district, with two of the head-office secretarial staff to do the office work, and instructions to exclude the district officers from their office.

On 29 September the tribunal issued its interpretations. Its award, it said, required, among other things, that, for piece-workers and workers on premium-bonus, piece-work prices and bonus times 'shall be such as will enable a worker of average ability to earn at least 27½ per cent over the new district basic time rates provided by the award'. Furthermore, 'where the inclusive rate . . . would be less in the case of any particular workman than the inclusive rate at which such workman would have been remunerated for the same work before the award, the necessary adjustment to be applied to the new basic rate or in the bonus . . . times shall be such as to make up the deficiency'. In other words, the award did not require engineering employers to increase the pay of their workers on piece-work or bonus as long as the piece-work prices or bonus times would allow a worker of average ability to earn 27.5 per cent over the new basic rate, and so long as these workers were not earning less than they had done on the same job before the award. The latter requirement might be held to preclude cutting prices or times, but there was nothing here requiring an employer to consolidate. This interpretation gave no comfort to the Barrow strikers, who stayed out. Another of the Engineers' national organizers, also a Communist, was sent to take over the work of the Huddersfield district committee, which had resigned in protest at the suspension of its Barrow colleagues, and Crane was joined at Barrow by Frank Foulkes, the Electricians' Communist national organizer. The two of them persuaded the company to replace its premium-bonus system with 'another more clearly resembling normal piece-work'.<sup>212</sup> The agreement was signed on 5 October, and the strike was called off. It had cost 100,000 working days. The other major engineering strike of 1943 was that by women workers at the Rolls-Royce factory at Hillington in Glasgow, which has already been described.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, Executive Council, *Minutes* (18 Sep. 1943).

<sup>212</sup> Croucher, 224.

<sup>213</sup> See above.



The major strike of munitions workers in 1944 involved both engineering and shipbuilding workers in Belfast. The dispute arose at the shipyard of Harland and Wolff, but when the Engineers in the yard came out on strike their colleagues in the Short and Harland aircraft factory struck in sympathy. Although in terms of working days lost this strike was one of the largest of the war, being surpassed only by the coalmining strike of the same year, it is difficult to find sources that describe it. Neither of the official historians of the labour aspects of the war, Parker and Inman, mentions it; Croucher makes one brief passing reference to it in his *Engineers at War*.<sup>214</sup> *The Times* appears to make no mention of it, or of the court case to which it gave rise, although the editor was fairly liberal with his restricted space for accounts of other strikes, and of prosecutions arising out of strikes. The records of the Engineering Employers' Federation give it scant attention. The only tolerably helpful source available appears to be the minutes of the Engineers' executive council.

On 25 February the shipyard fitters at Harland and Wolff's shipyard struck with the approval of the Engineers' executive council for an inclusive hourly rate of 15p. A national organizer of the union, Armstrong, who was in Belfast, reported to the executive council that the claim had been rejected by the company at a works conference, after which a vote was taken at an 'aggregate meeting' on 17 February which returned 1,041 votes to 104 in favour of a strike on 24 February. On 29 February the council rejected by 4 votes to 3 a proposal to wire Armstrong with instructions to get the men back to work. The majority may have felt that they did not know enough about the circumstances to take such a decision. Some of the story emerged from Armstrong's reports. Some smaller shipbuilding firms in Northern Ireland were paying their fitters an enhanced rate of £1.16 over the district rate, and it was believed that this had the approval of the Admiralty. Awareness of this had led to the claim for a rate of 15p an hour which was intended to put Harland and Wolff's fitters on a par with their colleagues in these small firms. The Admiralty informed the council that they had not authorized the enhanced rate, although it was aware of it. The firms might be surcharged. There was no possibility of the Admiralty agreeing to the 15p rate at Harland and Wolff, but 'they were agreeable to a system of piece-work, which so long as it was fair and equitable, could yield whatever the men earn'. The council decided to send two of its number, Mooney and Fitzpatrick, to Belfast with 'a free hand to take whatever steps are necessary to close down the dispute'.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>214</sup> Croucher, 240.

<sup>215</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, Executive Council, *Minutes* (9 Mar. 1944).

The two delegates reported to their colleagues a week later, on 21 March. From their names, it might be expected that they would have been able to grasp the situation in the Belfast shipyards readily enough, but they began: 'From the outset we experienced great difficulty in securing any reliable information as to the existing position. Strained relationships existed among the officials and an absence of any common understanding.' However, they learned that the claim for 15p an hour was not directly intended to put the fitters on a par with their colleagues in the small shipyards, although it was the enhanced rate there that had provoked the claim. The 15p was the average additional hourly earnings of the shipwrights and boilermakers on piece-work at Harland and Wolff's yard, and the fitters were seeking parity of earnings with them. The firm would not agree to the proposed rate, but was willing to introduce piece-work, or in the case of departments where piece-work had been dropped after Award 326, to reintroduce it and to pay an allowance during the period that that it would take.

On 13 March the delegates met the shop stewards from the relevant departments, when it was agreed that Mooney and Fitzpatrick should negotiate with the management, with the local officials in attendance. Then news arrived that Short and Harland workers had decided to strike in support of the shipyard fitters' claim for 15p a hour. The next day the delegates met the shop stewards from Short and Harland, with their convener in the chair, and persuaded them to delay their sympathetic strike. Then the delegates met the management of Harland and Wolff who offered them a small increase in the amount of the allowance pending the introduction of piece-work. The offer was put to the shop stewards, who insisted on the 15p rate. The next morning the whole work-force at Short and Harland struck without giving notice or presenting a claim to the management. On 16 March a mass meeting of the strikers at Harland and Wolff again voted on the company's offer and rejected it by five to one.

The delegates commented in their report: 'we appreciated that this ballot was for or against the piece-work system.' In the evening they met the district committee again. Half the committee, they said, worked at Short and Harland, and earned between 15p and 20p an hour. It was a 'system with which they were well satisfied, but opposed any similar system being introduced into the shipbuilding side of Messrs Harland and Wolff'. After all their meetings the delegates complained that the three local officials—Armstrong the national organizer, Madden the divisional organizer, and Luney the district secretary—had said nothing to help them, and that not one of them had on any occasion made 'any recommendations to the men to resume work'. On 17 March they made one more attempt to secure a further concession from the company, and

on 18 March they returned to London. There they told their colleagues that relations between Luney and Armstrong were 'such that we recommend Bro Armstrong being withdrawn from Belfast as early as possible'. Their final comments on the situation were:

The whole position is beset with political intrigue, but no one is prepared to give voice to his views, least of all Bro Luney [who] merely gives effect to the decisions of his District Committee.

The men have been led to believe that the difficulties in which the United Kingdom finds itself will compel the Government . . . to concede the [15p] per hour and so long as we remained there we were confirming that information.

We feel our efforts to have secured an orderly resumption of work would have been successful if we could have had what we had a right to expect, the support of the local Officials. This, however, was not forthcoming at any time.<sup>216</sup>

On 4 April the executive council learned that Morrou, the convenor at Short and Harland, and two other shop stewards had been sentenced to three months' hard labour as the 'actual leaders of the strike'. The council sent Mooney and Fitzpatrick back to Belfast, and empowered them to 'engage legal assistance'; and sent a telegram to the Northern Ireland government asking it to meet Mooney and Fitzpatrick 'because of the serious consequences arising from the prosecution and the sentences'. This time their mission was wholly successful. An agreement on the lines of the firm's offer was approved by the Belfast district committee on 6 April, and subsequently endorsed by the executive council; and the three shop stewards were released, pending an appeal. The men at Harland and Wolff returned to work on 10 April, and the next day their colleagues at Short and Harland followed their example.

Another considerable strike broke out in several centres of the shipbuilding and engineering industry in Great Britain in the latter stages of the Belfast strike. The strikers were apprentices, and their grievance concerned the ballot schemes for drafting young men into the coalmining industry as an alternative to military service. Apprentices were not included in the ballot so long as they had not completed their training, nor reached the age of 20, but they naturally disliked the prospect of being sent down the mines after that, and on the north-east coast a Tyneside Apprentices' Guild was formed at the end of 1943. In March 1944 it wrote to Bevin 'demanding immediate legislation within the next three weeks to guarantee the unconditional exemption of all apprentices from liability to direction under the ballot scheme',<sup>217</sup>

<sup>216</sup> The report submitted by Fitzpatrick and Mooney is included in the executive council's *Minutes* for 21 Mar. 1944. What they meant by 'political intrigue' in the context of the Protestant-dominated Belfast shipyards is best left to those who know Ulster to interpret. Armstrong was subsequently suspended by the executive council.

<sup>217</sup> Parker, 465.



threatening a strike if he did not comply; and it also decided to strike if any apprentices were called up. On 13 March notices of a strike on 28 March were issued on Tyneside, and also in the Clyde (where the guild had made contact with the Clyde apprentices) unless the notices of call-up for the mines that had been issued to three apprentices were cancelled. Mass meetings were held and Parliament was lobbied, but the notices were not cancelled and on 28 March, when the strike notices expired, some thousands of apprentices struck in the shipyards and engineering shops on the Tyne and the Clyde, and in engineering shops in Huddersfield. Union officials bent their efforts to persuade the strikers to go back to work, with some success in Glasgow and Huddersfield, so that within a few days the Tyneside apprentices were isolated, and by 12 April the strike was over there as well.

The Tyneside apprentices were in touch with Britain's leading Trotskyites.<sup>218</sup> The Trotskyite party was called the 'Revolutionary Communist Party', and attempted to extend its influence in the unions through its offshoot, the Workers' Industrial League, which had established a Clyde workers' committee, making use of the title of the organization that had attracted so much attention in the First World War.<sup>219</sup> J. W. Davy, the secretary of the Tyneside Apprentices' Guild was 'in close touch with Roy Tearse',<sup>220</sup> the industrial organizer of the Revolutionary Communist Party, and the party gave what support it could to the apprentices' strike, and produced a leaflet entitled 'Fight the Pit Compulsion Plot'.<sup>221</sup> Roughly speaking, the Trotskyite attitude to the war was much the same as that pursued by the Communist Party up to the Nazi invasion of Russia, that the war was an imperialist war, and that the interest of the workers was best served by pursuing the class war, regardless of any consideration of its effect on the prosecution of the war against Germany.

On 5 April the Special Branch raided the offices of the Revolutionary Communist Party on Tyneside and in London, and Davy's house, to collect information, and after the strike was over the director of public prosecutions brought charges against Tearse, Jock Haston (the organizing secretary of the Revolutionary Communist Party), Heaton Lee (its North-east organizer) and Ann Keen. They were charged under the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act 1927, and also under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875, 'with conspiring to

<sup>218</sup> Figures of the number of apprentices on strike and of the number of working days lost in the strike are not included in the appropriate monthly report on industrial disputes in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* or in the report on industrial disputes for the year 1944 which appeared in the *Gazette* in Jan. 1945. The explanation for this may well be that the ministry decided that the strike was not an industrial dispute, but a political strike, due to the involvement of the Revolutionary Communist Party.

<sup>220</sup> Croucher, 233.

<sup>219</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 135-8.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* 237.



cause an illegal dispute, inciting it, and furthering it'.<sup>222</sup> On 19 June they were found guilty of furthering the strike, but innocent of the other charges. Tearse and Lee were sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment, Haston to six months, and Keen to thirteen days, which meant her immediate release. They appealed, and in September the Court of Appeal quashed their sentences 'on the ground that, as the strike had not begun till 28th March, only acts subsequent to that date were relevant to the charge . . . whereas the jury had been invited to consider evidence relating to events prior to 28th March'.<sup>223</sup> Bevin used the occasion of the apprentices' strike to make a new regulation against wartime strikes: Order 1AA. This made it an indictable offence to 'instigate or incite any other person to take part in, or otherwise act in furtherance of any stoppage among persons engaged in the performance of essential services', and provided for Draconian penalties of up to five years' penal servitude or a fine of £500, or both.<sup>224</sup>

One other strike in the munitions industries is worthy of mention, not for its size or its cause, but for the conduct of the manager. The firm was Trent Guns and Cartridges at Grimsby, which employed mainly women, some of whom towards the end of 1940 wrote to Margaret Bondfield, national woman officer of the General and Municipal Workers, complaining of their pay and conditions. She arranged for one of the union's officers in the Midland region to visit them. When he arrived at the firm, the manager had him 'arrested', explaining afterwards that he thought the man was a 'fifth columnist'. A meeting was held on 29 January 1941 at which sixty women enrolled in the union. The manager then addressed the women, asking them not to join the union, and telling them of his intention to seek an increase in his contract prices so as to raise their wages. All the workers joined the union which submitted a pay-claim; but the manager would not meet the union, even when a conciliation officer of the Ministry of Labour interceded with him on their behalf. The union sent the claim to the National Arbitration Tribunal. In April a woman was dismissed for questioning a girl about her intention to leave the union, and her colleagues struck to secure her reinstatement. In June the tribunal awarded the rates laid down by the Stamped and Pressed Metal Wares Trade Board 'provided that nothing in this award shall operate to reduce existing rates of pay'. In June, Bevin appointed a court of Inquiry to

<sup>222</sup> The Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act makes a strike illegal 'if it has any object other than or in addition to the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in which the strikers are engaged; and is a strike designed or calculated to coerce the Government either directly or by inflicting hardship on the community'. <sup>223</sup> Parker, 466.

<sup>224</sup> The order was opposed in the House of Commons by Aneurin Bevan, who 'delivered one of the most devastating speeches of his life', but it was carried by 314 votes to 23 (Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevin, i. 1897-1945* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1962), 451-6).

investigate the dispute. The court found that some workers had gone back to the firm, and others had found jobs elsewhere, but forty-five were still out of work after two months on strike. It concluded that the behaviour of the manager, Mr King, might be acceptable in peacetime, but 'in war time we think that, however strongly individuals may desire to run their works their own way, it is their duty to their country to fall into line with the vast majority of other good employers and assist the Government in the accepted methods of conciliation'.<sup>225</sup> The outcome was not published. Perhaps the contracting department put pressure on Mr King to conform. If so, surely it would have been wiser, and more humane, to do so earlier in the dispute?

There were strikes in other industries, for instance in construction, in the docks, and in road transport. There were also strikes of white-collar workers. In 1940-1 the white-collar section of the Transport and General Workers, the National Association of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs, was pursuing a claim for recognition by Richard Thomas, a tinsmith firm in Wales, among whose staff it claimed a substantial membership. When the firm refused, the union submitted a salary-claim to the National Arbitration Tribunal. The tribunal ordered that graduated minimum salary scales should be established for the company's white-collar staff, but had no power to order the firm to negotiate over these scales with the union. When the scales were fixed by the company, the union set in motion a claim that they were unsatisfactory, which they hoped would be referred to the tribunal; but, before that could be done the suspension of a union member for insubordination led to a strike at the end of March 1941, which spread to the manual workers until about 8,000 employees were on strike. The Ministry of Labour intervened and arranged a return to work on the understanding that the company would give favourable consideration to recognizing the union. Instead the management asked its staff to join a company-sponsored staff association. Next a court of inquiry was set up. Its report gave strong support to the union; but the firm still would not grant recognition. 'Finally, Bevin threatened to use the government's emergency powers to take over the firm for the duration. Faced with this prospect, Richard Thomas gave way and recognised the NACSS in January 1942.'<sup>226</sup>

Overall, however, coalmining, engineering, and shipbuilding between them accounted for the majority of the wartime strikes in Britain, and the overwhelming majority of working days lost through strikes. An overall review of the course of strikes during the war must take account

<sup>225</sup> *Report of a Court of Inquiry into a Dispute between Trent Guns and Cartridges, Grimsby and the National Union of General and Municipal Workers*, Cmd. 6300 (July 1941).

<sup>226</sup> Bain, 164.

of that predominance. The standard explanation of variations in the number of wartime strikes is given by Inman: 'The incidence of stoppages was strongly influenced by the state of the war. During the Dunkirk period the number of strikes was at a minimum; in the long period of waiting before D-Day, from mid-1943 to March 1944 it was high.'<sup>227</sup> If this explanation is valid, it must apply also to the variation in the number of working days lost through strikes. For, if the state of a war inclines workers to strike, it will surely not only incline them to strike more frequently, but also to strike in larger numbers, and to stay out longer when they are on strike; and the figures in Table 1 seem to demonstrate this tendency in the trends both of strikes and of working days lost in strikes. The 'Dunkirk effect' is visible in the relatively low totals for strikes and for working days lost in all industries and services in 1940-1 and the 'war weariness effect' in the relatively high totals in both columns for 1943-4. However, the figures show that both effects were much more powerful in coalmining than elsewhere. The overall figures are low in 1940 and 1941, and high in 1944 mainly because of the increase in the number of strikes and working days lost in coalmining.

It may therefore be more profitable to look for the explanation for wartime strike trends in factors affecting coalmines than in general factors affecting workers everywhere. Among the former were, of course, the anxiety of the miners to regain a pre-eminent position in the league table of earnings, and their gradual realization that the war gave them an excellent opportunity to do so. Another factor was the lack of prescience shown by the members of the National Reference Tribunal in the coalmining industry. Had they reflected sufficiently, and certainly if they had consulted with advisers knowledgeable about the coalmining industry, they would have foreseen the consequences of awarding a substantial increase in minimum wage rates without any provision for maintaining differentials.

Another influence on wartime strikes was the imposition of legal penalties on strikers by Order 1305. The first convictions under the order were in April 1941 when six ringleaders of the apprentices' strike were bound over after the strikers had gone back to work. Heavier penalties were imposed early in the following year during a strike at the Betteshanger Colliery in the Kent coalfield. In November 1941 sixty men working difficult faces had started a go-slow against what they considered to be inadequate allowances granted to them in compensation. In December the management sent them home, and a complete stoppage threatened. The dispute was referred to arbitration. The

<sup>227</sup> Inman, 395.

arbitrator found against the men, but the trouble continued. On 9 January the union branch called all its members out on strike. The Ministers of Mines and Labour agreed that there was 'no practicable alternative to prosecution'<sup>228</sup> under Order 1305. All 1,050 miners received summonses, and their cases were heard by the Canterbury bench on 23 January.

Everything on the day was orderly and even festive. Bands played and women and children cheered the procession on its way to the Court. The proceedings in Court went smoothly; everyone pleaded guilty. . . . The branch secretary was sentenced to two months with hard labour; the local president and a member of the local executive each received one month with hard labour. Thirty-five men were fined £3 or one month's imprisonment, and nearly a thousand were fined £1, or fourteen days.

Protests came against the severity of the sentences, particularly against the imprisonment of the three officials. . . . There was talk of sympathetic strikes. But the real trouble was that the only men who could call off the strike were now in gaol. . . . Negotiations were reopened and five days after the hearing an agreement was signed, in prison, between the colliery management and the Kent Miners' Union. Apart from some face-saving words, it gave the men what they wanted. . . . The men would not start work until their leaders were free. After eleven days in prison they were released. The mine reopened and in the first week the normal output was nearly trebled. . . .

[Soon afterwards] the Clerk to the Justices reported that of the men who had been fined only nine had paid. Before he went to the trouble of preparing a thousand commitment warrants the Clerk asked whether it was proposed to recommend remission. The County gaol could only accommodate a few at a time and it would take several years to work through the list. . . . The Court was advised not to enforce the unpaid fines.<sup>229</sup>

Despite this set-back, Bevin sanctioned proceedings under the order on several occasions over the next two years, but there were no further sentences of imprisonment, and in one case where heavy fines were imposed, 'a substantial part . . . was eventually paid by the men's union. In one instance the cases were dismissed after the strikers had expressed their regret and given assurances against a repetition.'<sup>230</sup> No one can say in how many instances the mere existence of the order may have deterred workers from striking.

If, then, Order 1305 might have been judged a modest success by perhaps preventing some strikes and by getting some strikers back to work, why did Bevin push through Order 1AA in April 1944? Parker asserts that

<sup>228</sup> Parker, 461.

<sup>229</sup> *Written Evidence of Sir Harold Emmerson to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations*. Cmnd. 3623 (1968), app. 6.

<sup>230</sup> Parker, 469.



In the autumn of 1943 the Minister was firmly of the opinion that the chief cause of the strikes that were becoming numerous in the engineering and coalmining industries was political rather than industrial. He believed that workers were being incited and instigated to stop work by subversive elements, both within and without industry, bent on using the strike weapon to further their own mischievous ends.<sup>231</sup>

This cannot be true. Bevin was better aware than most men that workers do not readily strike at the behest of outside agitators. Had it been the Communist Party that he suspected of instigating strikes, Parker's statement might deserve consideration, for the strength of the Communist Party had increased rapidly since the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Germans, and the party's membership was well on its way to the peak of 50,000 which it achieved at the end of the war. Moreover, its main strength was inside the unions, notably among the Engineers and the Miners, especially in South Wales and Scotland. However, at this stage of the war, no one could have been more outspoken against strikes than the Communists, and no one could have been more active in trying to persuade strikers to return to work than the considerable body of Communist full-time officers among the Engineers or than Arthur Horner in South Wales. Following an unofficial strike at Barrow in the autumn of 1943, a Communist official, Crane, was sent by the Engineers' executive council to take over the work of the district committee, and another Communist, Hannington, was instructed to take over from the Huddersfield district committee which had resigned in sympathy with Barrow.<sup>232</sup> In August of the same year miners at the Penrhincoiber Colliery in the Aberdare valley had voted to strike over a change in the method of payment for piece-work 'in the teeth of EC pressure (Horner said it was the first time in twenty-five years that he had been turned down by a mass meeting)'.<sup>233</sup> In the strike at the Tyne shipyards in October 1942, the general secretary of the Communist Party, Harry Pollitt, himself a boilermaker, went to exercise his considerable persuasive powers on the shop stewards to get their members back to work. However, the Trotskyites were far fewer in number than the Communists, and the comparison between the strength of the two parties in the unions was even more adverse to the Trotskyites. Bevin had little to fear from them, and he must have known it.

The only evidence that Parker quotes in support of his assertions is a speech that Bevin made in the House of Commons on 24 September 1943.<sup>234</sup> He also gave much the same justification for his proposal to his

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.* 470.

<sup>232</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, Executive Council, *Minutes*, 4, 5, 19, 26 Oct. 1943.

<sup>233</sup> Francis and Smith, 406-7.

<sup>234</sup> HC Debs., 1 Dec. 1938, col. 666.

former trade union colleagues when he attended a special meeting of the General Council on 5 April 1944 to win its support. He spoke of 'unofficial strikes promoted largely by non-trade union organisations', instancing Trotskyites in the apprentices' strike and the miners' strike in which 'whilst the leaders had got certain pits back to work, outsiders had come along and got the men out again'. He went on to say that there was a serious gap in the existing regulations, since 'he could not get at the aiders and abettors without first prosecuting strikers'.<sup>235</sup> Citrine supported him, saying that 'he understood the Minister's dilemma. . . . Instigators and fomenters of strikes should be brought within the terms of the Regulation.' The General Council agreed a resolution supporting Bevin, and left the consideration of a draft regulation to its representatives on the Joint Consultative Committee. There was, however, a flaw in Bevin's case. He was able to prosecute the instigators of strikes, under the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927, and he was about to use the Act to prosecute the Trotskyite abettors of the apprentices' strike. However, he told the General Council that he did not want to use the 1927 Act. The Council elaborated in its report to Congress. The Act, it said, 'is an instrument which the whole Movement dislikes intensely and desires to repeal. We believe that Trade Unionists would rather the Government did not use this Act'.<sup>236</sup>

The new regulation was never used. The wave of major strikes in coalmining and munitions in the spring of 1944 died away, and there were no further strikes on anything like that scale until after the war had ended. Parker gives another reason:

While it might have been possible to identify persons for prosecution, it would certainly have been very difficult to produce evidence upon which their guilt could have been established in Court. Moreover, enquiries into the activities of militant bodies showed that their tactics were to wait until a stoppage had occurred and then to encourage the strikers to stay out. There was little to suggest that they were directly instigating or inciting workers to begin a strike.<sup>237</sup>

Bevin was therefore seeking a new regulation which duplicated powers that already existed; which were unlikely to serve the purpose for which, apparently, he intended them; and which were in fact never used. His biographer has suggested that 'the simplest explanation is that the wartime strain was beginning to tell on Bevin too—it would be

<sup>235</sup> He was referring here to the provisions of the Accessories and Abettors Act 1861.

<sup>236</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), 142. The report also showed that the General Council had amended the draft regulation to provide that it should not be an offence 'to take any action or make any statements at a properly constituted meeting duly summoned by an authorised person under the constitution of his Trade Union or appropriate Federation of Trade Unions' (p. 141).

<sup>237</sup> Parker, 470-1.

surprising if it had not—and that this affected his judgment'.<sup>238</sup> But that is implausible. Although his mind usually worked by intuition rather than by logic, he almost invariably knew what he was doing, and why; and there is no corroborative evidence that his judgement was affected by 'wartime strain'.

Is there an alternative explanation? Croucher has provided one. Bevin 'chose to promulgate a new regulation because it was apparent that what was needed was a political pronouncement of the government's intention to come down hard on industrial militancy in general'.<sup>239</sup> The country had just experienced by far the biggest strike-wave of the war. If it were continued, it could endanger the long-awaited opening of the 'second front' in Europe. By pinning the blame on the Trotskyites, Bevin diverted attention from the trade-unionists who had come out on strike, and by Order 1AA he gave evidence of the government's intention of dealing firmly with outside trouble-makers who incited trade unionists to strike.

#### *Bevin as Minister of Labour and National Service*

This chapter has so far indicated that Bevin played an extremely important part in the running of the war, and in the War Cabinet—second only to Churchill. Why was he so influential? The first factor is the elevation of the wartime Ministry of Labour and National Service from the position of a second-rank ministry in peacetime and in the early months of the war to the status of one of the great offices of state, along with the Treasury, the Foreign Office, and the War Office. The primary reasons for this were that the basis of wartime planning was manpower and its allocation, and that all aspects of manpower were the responsibility of his ministry, instead of being distributed among several agencies as in the First World War. The second factor was his standing in the War Cabinet, arising mainly from his relationship with the Prime Minister. 'The other members of the Cabinet noticed . . . that he [Churchill] was always careful and took no liberties in his treatment of Bevin—he handled him with kid gloves, Eden said . . . He left him virtually a free hand and intervened less in the business of the Ministry of Labour than in that of almost any department.'<sup>240</sup> A third factor was his relationship with his civil servants. Long after the war those who had served in the ministry under Bevin continued to speak of him in terms of adulation. This was, of course, due to the confidence that he found he could place in them. He found 'among its senior officials a number of men equal to the demands made on them by its conversion into a key

<sup>238</sup> Bullock, ii, 270.

<sup>239</sup> Croucher, ii, 243.

<sup>240</sup> Bullock, ii, 112.

economic ministry'.<sup>241</sup> These relationships with Churchill and the staff of the Ministry of Labour and National Service arose out of the qualities he showed as minister—his judgement, the backing he was prepared to give to his officials, and his knowledge. Because of his twenty years of service at the apex of the trade union movement, because his own union straddled most of the major industries in the country, and because he possessed a retentive memory, he was an expert in almost every aspect of the ministry's business.

Another factor, which also supported all the others, was his relationship with trade unions and employers. He continued in close touch with his trade union colleagues, especially with his former colleagues on the General Council. From time to time he attended a meeting of the Council to tell them what he was doing or proposing to do, or to discuss a problem. The members of the Council who were also members of the Joint Consultative Committee saw a great deal more of him than that. The frequency of its meetings varied somewhere between weekly and monthly. His strange partnership with Citrine persisted. The two men drew no closer. They had a public row about the supply of skilled manpower for the forces, on which Citrine chaired a committee which, justifiably, criticized the position Bevin had taken up;<sup>242</sup> but they continued to back each other up over almost every other issue that arose.

Finally, there were the employers. Because of the spread of industries for which his union catered, many leading employers had had dealings with Bevin before the war, and had experienced his good sense, knowledge, reliability, and his determination that agreements, once struck, must be honoured; and those who served on the Joint Consultative Committee shared the experience of their trade union colleagues of serving under his chairmanship in what amounted almost to a cabinet for settling wartime manpower issues. Some of them, like the senior officials at the ministry, continued to speak of Bevin in awed tones long after the war.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* 119.

<sup>242</sup> Bullock, ii. 132-6.



## Wartime Politics and Post-war Planning

### *The Labour Party at War*

Much of the peacetime activity of British political parties was suspended from the beginning of the war by the agreement between the three major parties on an electoral truce, whereby they undertook not to nominate candidates for vacant parliamentary seats against the candidate of the party that had held the seat before the vacancy occurred. This agreement did not, of course, prevent minor parties or independent candidates from contesting by-elections, but it did mean that in most by-elections there was little chance of the party in possession losing the seat. The incentive to local party activity was thus reduced and it was further limited by the suspension by Act of Parliament of local elections, leaving it to the local parties to replace by nomination councillors who died or retired. The advent of the coalition government further restricted normal party activities in Parliament since there was now no opposition party. Criticism of government actions and proposals was left to individuals or temporary groupings. A further limitation was the suspension of private members' bills and motions.

However, these conditions did not prevent the Labour Party from developing its own approach to many of the issues that arose, especially in the period before the coalition was formed. For example, on the third day of the debate on the King's Speech on 5 December 1939 at the opening of the 1939-40 session, a Labour motion introduced by Dalton expressed 'regret' at 'the absence of any proposals for organising to the full our human and material resources in the national interest for the effective prosecution of the war, for the provision and maintenance of an adequate standard of life for all, and for the solution on the basis of social justice of the problems which will arise on the return of peace'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the National Executive issued a statement entitled 'Labour, the War and the Peace' on 9 February 1940 which stated that, after the war was won, 'The most far-sighted and least dangerous policy is to seek to win the co-operation, as an equal partner, of a Germany governed by a political system whose aims and needs run parallel to ours.' It went on to demand

<sup>1</sup> HC Debs., Fifth Series, Vol. 355, col. 499.

that the Peace Settlement shall establish a new Association or Commonwealth of States, the collective authority of which must transcend, over a proper sphere, the sovereign rights of separate States. This authority must control such military and economic power as will enable it to enforce peaceful behaviour as between members, and thus secure the all-round reduction of national armaments to a level required by the preservation of internal order.<sup>2</sup>

The statement was approved at the party conference in May, by which time the coalition government had been formed. Richard Crossman pointed out that it was not going to be easy for the Labour Members in the government 'to see to it that our Peace Aims prevail'. He asked for an assurance that there would be 'close contact and intimate collaboration between the National Executive and the Cabinet on this subject'. Dalton, replying for the executive, gave that assurance.<sup>3</sup>

There was nothing to prevent the Labour Party, through its ministers, trying to press Labour policies on the government. One early example of this was the abolition of the household means test by the Determination of Needs Act of 1941 which substituted an individual means test. Since by this time unemployment had been greatly reduced, the main effect of the Act was in its subsequent extension to cover supplementary pensions, which had been introduced by the government as an alternative to Labour's proposal for an all-round increase in the amount of all old-age pensions. But once the government had decided an issue, that decision was binding on Labour ministers, and they had to bring their party into line. A resolution that would have committed the party and its ministers to outright abolition of the means test was defeated at the 1942 party conference after the executive had appealed for it to be withdrawn.<sup>4</sup>

The issue that caused the most controversy was the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927. Both the party and the Trades Union Congress were committed to its repeal, but under the coalition government, they were prepared to compromise on its amendment. A deputation to Chamberlain in March 1940 had been rebuffed. In January 1941 it was agreed that the Labour ministers should make an informal approach to Churchill on the subject.<sup>5</sup> This does not appear to have had any success, and the General Council decided to seek an interview with him. At this stage there arose the possibility of conflict between the General Council and the Labour Party. Both were committed to the total repeal of the Act which they regarded as not only damaging to the interests of the party and the unions, but a vindictive piece of legislation. However, their interests in the individual sections of

<sup>2</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1940), 188-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 136-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 139-40.

<sup>5</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (29 Jan. 1941).

the Act were different. Section 4 had replaced the pre-1927 provision that members of unions affiliated to the Labour Party should pay the political levy unless they individually contracted out of the obligation to do so, by a requirement that members of such trade unions must positively and individually assent to the levy before they were required to pay it. This change had substantially reduced the number paying the levy, and therefore the income of the party; and the party was keen to return to the pre-1927 provision. Congress, by contrast, was particularly anxious to secure the repeal of section 5 of the Act, which debarred Civil Service unions from affiliating to either the Labour Party or Congress; of section 6 which prevented local and other public authorities from imposing a closed shop on their employees, and from requiring their contractors to impose closed shops on their employees; and of section 3, which severely limited the right to picket in strikes.

It occurred to the General Council, in its anxiety to make progress, that the Conservatives' concern—apart from their desire to retain sections 1 and 2 which rendered a general strike illegal and prevented trade unions from using their disciplinary powers to penalize a member who refused to take part in such a strike—would be to retain section 4, and, provided they were assured of that, might be willing to contemplate the repeal of sections 3, 5, and 6. The Council approached the National Executive Committee of the party whose Emergency Committee agreed that it should go ahead with a proposal on these lines;<sup>6</sup> and thus encouraged, it asked to see the Prime Minister. The meeting took place on 10 April 1941. At a meeting of the 'three executives' on 7 May the General Council reported that it had told Churchill that it

did not believe that Party political strife was likely to arise on the industrial section of the Act . . . and they had endeavoured to separate the two parts and confine their representations for the time being to that dealing with trade unions and their industrial activities. . . . If they were able to assure themselves in advance that there would not be the acute political controversy in the House that the Prime Minister envisaged, they asked could he not ascertain from his people their position. He said it was worth thinking over, and he would give the matter definite consideration.

Lees-Smith then reported the views of the Administrative Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party:

It was believed that this Act, as soon as it came before the Parliamentary Party or before the House of Commons, would bring to the surface immense latent feeling, especially on those parts of the Act they had agreed not to touch. He

<sup>6</sup> Labour Party, Emergency Committee, *Minutes* (31 Mar. 1941).

was afraid they would find it impracticable to persuade the Parliamentary Party to have a series of discussions on the floor of the House in which they must refrain from agitating for the repeal of those parts of the Act about which they cared most. . . . He thought the Party would be split on the issue.<sup>7</sup>

In the end the meeting agreed that the General Council should be free to pursue the matter further, if it thought that 'desirable'. It did so a week later, on 15 May, when it met the full parliamentary party. Lees-Smith explained that he and his colleagues had wanted to meet the Council 'in view of the difficulty they had had in getting through the House Bills embodying anything less than 100% of the Party's programme'. However, contrary to his prediction at the meeting of the executives, the parliamentary party was 'prepared to co-operate in the passage of the limited Bill proposed without raising the other issues involved in the Act, without prejudice to the policy to be pursued after the war'.<sup>8</sup> Evidently Lees-Smith and his colleagues on the Administrative Committee of the parliamentary party had not taken adequate soundings before they reported to the meeting of the three executives. Perhaps they had failed to appreciate the attitude that the trade union Members of Parliament would be likely to take on the issue.

However, the support of the parliamentary party did not settle the matter, for there was still the Conservative response to come. Churchill asked the General Council to appoint seven of its number to meet seven representatives of his party.<sup>9</sup> The meeting took place on 11 December 1941. A memorandum was circulated to the members of the Council, but, as it had been agreed with the Conservatives that no record of the joint meeting should be kept, the copies were collected at the end of the Council meeting held on 17 December, and nothing in the minutes of that meeting indicates what the Conservatives said.<sup>10</sup> However, when Citrine met Churchill on 21 July 1942, he was told that the Conservative Party felt that 'the time was not opportune to raise the question, and they had strong views that the matter should be deferred until after the war'. Citrine replied that the Council 'could not, of course, accept the position and that they did not regard themselves as being bound by the political truce'.<sup>11</sup>

The next move came from the Union of Post Office Workers which wrote to the Council early in 1943 saying that it proposed to affiliate its branches to local trades councils. This action, it believed, would be in breach of section 5 of the Act. The Council replied that it was in sympathy with this decision, but asked the Post Office Workers to wait

<sup>7</sup> These quotations are from the minutes of the three national committees, which are included in the records both of the Labour Party and of the General Council.

<sup>8</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (15 May 1941).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* (17 Dec. 1941).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* (3 Sept. 1941).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* (22 July 1942).



for it to talk to the Labour ministers about it.<sup>12</sup> It approached Attlee, who, after talking to Bevin and Morrison, told them that he thought it 'not possible to do anything more . . . at the present time'.<sup>13</sup> In May the General Council learned that the annual conference of the Post Office Workers had approved the decision to affiliate their branches to trades councils, and had also decided to discuss with the Council the question of reaffiliation to Congress.<sup>14</sup> The Council 'felt that they had no alternative but to recommend to Congress to accept the application of the Union'. It had the power to accept the application itself, but Citrine 'felt it desirable to indicate to the public that acceptance should be by recommendation to Congress. That would have the advantage of providing a breathing space'.<sup>15</sup> However, at a meeting of the three executives on 8 June Attlee said: 'They had entered the Government on the basis of fighting the war . . . and it was difficult to connect with the war effort the changes in the Trade Unions Act. . . . They could not get a change until they had a majority in the House of Commons for it. They could either break up the Government or carry on.'

Successive meetings of the General Council continued to reaffirm its decision to recommend the acceptance of the union's application.<sup>16</sup> The government issued a warning that 'severe penalties, in particular the loss of pension rights, would be inflicted on their [the Union of Post Office Workers'] members, or those of any other civil service union which defied the law by becoming affiliated. Our General Council met the UPW in conference and warned them of the limitations on our power to protect them.'<sup>17</sup> Three other Civil Service unions, the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, the Post Office Engineers, and the Civil Service Clerical Association, went to see the Prime Minister to say that, if he could give them 'some encouragement that legislation would be forthcoming that would enable them to associate with the Trades Union Congress', they would try to persuade the Post Office Workers to withdraw their application. 'They received no encouragement . . . whatsoever.'<sup>18</sup>

The issue was finally settled by the Labour ministers. At the meeting of the Council at which Citrine had reported the initiative of the three Civil Service unions, he also told his colleagues of an interview on 9 August with Attlee, who had said that the government did not consider

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* (27 Jan. 1943).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* (21 Apr. 1943).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* (26 May 1943).

<sup>15</sup> This is a revised version of the decision reached by the Council on 26 May and recorded in the minutes, which read, 'in the event of the UPW making application for reaffiliation to Congress such application should be accepted'; and was issued to the press. After the meeting Citrine decided that, as he explained on 8 June, those words 'were not strictly in accordance with the decision of the Council'. He therefore issued a revised version to the press. His colleagues accepted what he had done (*ibid.* (8 June 1943)).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* (16 June, 23 June, 19 Aug. 1943).

<sup>17</sup> Citrine, ii. 243.

<sup>18</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (19 Aug. 1943).

the affiliation of branches of the Civil Service unions to trades councils to be in breach of the Act; that the government was not prepared to introduce legislation to repeal the Act because 'they could not get it through the House'; and that Attlee and the other Labour members of the government 'were prepared to enforce the provisions of the Act against the Civil Servants'. Citrine spoke extremely bitterly about the Labour ministers who, he felt, did not realize the strength of feeling among union members about the Act.<sup>19</sup> Following this meeting the Council went on to a session of the three executives, where it was arranged, following a suggestion from the chairman of the Labour Party, that a subcommittee should see the Post Office Workers along with the three other Civil Service unions to persuade the Post Office Workers to withdraw their application. This mission was successfully accomplished.

The most plausible explanation of the behaviour of the General Council over this issue is that Citrine had set his heart on achieving some concessions from the coalition government on the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act as a reward for trade union support, and believed that he could do so with the help of the Labour ministers. The General Council supported him, but the Conservative Party would not give way, and the Labour ministers were not prepared to threaten to withdraw from the government to help him. Such a bluff might have been called by the Conservative Party. Further discussions on the amendment of the Act continued into 1945, with no prospect of success, until, on 10 March 1945, Churchill wrote to Citrine saying that 'the overwhelming mass of Conservatives would not support such an amendment' and expressing his—eminently sensible—view that 'In view of the approaching General Election . . . this question is one which should be submitted to the electorate'.<sup>20</sup>

No other political issue affecting the trade unions attracted so much continuing attention during the war years as the 1927 Act, not even the nationalization of the coalmines. Each crisis over the output of coal led to proposals for more effective government control of the coalmining industry. From time to time the Miners raised the question of nationalization, but there was no likelihood of the coalition government agreeing to that, and the furthest that the Labour Party was prepared to go was to give support in February 1942 to the Miners' proposal for a coal board consisting of representatives of the government, the Mining Association, and the Miners to control the industry,<sup>21</sup> but both they and the Miners were reasonably satisfied with the system of government control established later that year.<sup>22</sup> The issue of nationalization of

<sup>19</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (19 Aug. 1943).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* (1942), 3-5.

<sup>20</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1945), 3.

<sup>22</sup> See Ch. 3.

coalmining and other industries arose on 2 December 1941 when the Prime Minister introduced a motion to extend the obligation for national service to those groups of men not yet covered, and to women. Although the General Council and the Parliamentary Labour Party had given their support to these proposals, some Labour Members tabled an amendment accepting manpower compulsion, but also stating that it was 'essential that industries vital to the successful prosecution of the war, and especially transport, coal-mining and the manufacture of munitions, should be brought under public ownership and control'. This amendment was supported by the votes of thirty-five Labour Members, three Independent Labour Party Members, three Liberals, and an Independent; and ten votes, eight from Labour Members, were cast against the motion.<sup>23</sup>

Two issues that deeply stirred the conscience of the Labour Party during the war were the internment of aliens in 1940, and the civil war in Greece in 1944.

When the danger of invasion was imminent at the end of June, 1940, the National Executive Committee, after carefully considering the whole problem, decided in favour of the principle of the general internment of enemy aliens (Germans and Austrians) and generally, within that principle, that those, both men and women, who could usefully be employed on war work of national importance, should be so employed.

The manner in which the policy was carried out, however, soon caused the Labour Movement the deepest concern and alarm.

Among other things, it was concerned with the indiscriminate internment of socialists and trade-unionists with known anti-Fascist credentials, the difficulty of obtaining exemptions for those who were not physically fit, and the conditions to which the internees were subjected. But after representations were made to the Home Secretary, Morrison, the position 'rapidly improved'.<sup>24</sup> At the party conference of 1944 Arthur Greenwood, who had been dropped from the War Cabinet and the government at the beginning of 1942, moved a resolution regretting 'the tragic situation' in Greece and asking the government to facilitate an armistice with a view to establishing a provisional national government there. The debate brought a good deal of criticism of the actions of the British government over Greece, and a spirited defence of government by Bevin, who put the blame for the civil war then raging on the Greek Communists. The resolution was carried by a massive majority after Bevan had said that 'It would be deplorable if the unanimous carrying of this resolution was regarded as an endorsement of Mr Bevin's speech'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> National Executive Committee, *Minutes* (8 Dec. 1941).

<sup>24</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1941), 29.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), 143-8.

During the war Bevan had made himself an unofficial leader of parliamentary opposition to the coalition government. He had already crossed swords with Bevin earlier in 1944 when, on 28 April, he had moved a 'prayer' to annul Order 1AA, making what his biographer described as 'one of the most devastating speeches of his life'.<sup>26</sup> Bevin of course carried the day, despite the lack of substantial justification for what he had done.<sup>27</sup> His majority was 314 to 23. However, of 165 Labour Members only sixty-five had voted against annulment, and twenty-three of these were 'Ministers, Whips or Parliamentary Private Secretaries'.<sup>28</sup>

The party leadership had already shown its concern about indiscipline in the House of Commons on 25 February when the Administrative Committee of the parliamentary party met the National Executive Committee to tell it that over 'the past year or two . . . some members had ignored their pledge to abide by Standing Orders and be loyal to Party decisions', and to say 'that it would be very useful and salutary if the greater authority of the NEC could be invoked by a direct approach to each and every Member'. The National Executive Committee accepted that it had a special responsibility as the pledge was required before candidates could receive the endorsement of the executive,<sup>29</sup> which had also given its approval to Order 1AA on 26 April.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly the two committees met together again on 16 May to recommend that Bevan be required to give 'specific assurances' of future conformity on pain of exclusion,<sup>31</sup> and on 25 May a sub-committee decided that it should in future be a disciplinary offence for a Labour Member to put down a motion contrary to a recommendation of the parliamentary party.

The recommendation for disciplinary action against Bevan required the confirmation of the parliamentary party. The meeting held for this purpose was 'the largest for years', and a triumph for Bevan. An amendment to shelve the matter was carried by 71 votes to 60. Bevan may also have taken comfort from the vote at Congress in September, when the reference back of the General Council's defence of Order 1AA was defeated by only 3,686,000 votes to 2,802,000.<sup>32</sup> Discipline is a perennial problem for the Labour Party. At the beginning of the war Bevan had been in danger of expulsion over his association with popular-front activities, but in November 1939 he signed a declaration, which (as he was a Miners' Member of Parliament) had the approval of the Miners' Federation, and which Attlee and the officers of the National Executive Committee felt should be accepted in view of its

<sup>26</sup> Foot, 451.

<sup>27</sup> See above.

<sup>28</sup> Foot, 456.

<sup>29</sup> National Executive Committee, *Minutes* (25 Feb. 1944).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* (16 May 1944).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* (16 May 1944).

<sup>32</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944) 207-15.



'approximation' to the requirements laid down by the Executive. Their view was accepted by the Executive.<sup>33</sup>

Early in 1940 another disciplinary issue had arisen over the action of D. N. Pritt, himself a member of the National Executive, in giving support to the Communist Party campaign in favour of the Russian invasion of Finland. He was expelled. A further question of co-operation with the Communist Party arose in relation to an organization called the 'People's Convention' sponsored by the Communist Party, with the intention of widening support for the Communist policy of opposition to the war. This new body organized conferences in various centres which attracted some support because they provided opportunities not otherwise available to discuss wartime issues and questions of post-war reconstruction. The concern of the Labour Party was shown by the decision of the National Executive Committee to hold a special meeting with Labour ministers before deciding what was to be done. The meeting was held on 21 January 1941. Attlee emphasized the need 'for publicity and propaganda combating the activities of the Communist Party and the organisers of the People's Convention'. A press statement was put out to say that 'The "People's Convention" has been repudiated by each section of the organised Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative Movements, and in no way represented the views of their membership.'<sup>34</sup> Subsequently the committee expelled 'a number of people' who refused to withdraw their association with the convention, but reported that over forty of those who were cautioned did in fact withdraw. Two local parties had been disaffiliated, and 'the Movement in a small number of other constituencies has been reorganised'.<sup>35</sup>

Another organization that was to make capital—and a good deal more of it than the People's Convention—out of providing a forum for political discussion was the Common Wealth Party, founded by Sir Richard Acland in 1942. Its aims were socialist, but it differed from the Labour Party in that it was not bound by the electoral truce. The truce was in any case unpopular with many local Labour parties. Between the 1935 general election and the outbreak of war the Labour Party had gained thirteen seats in by-elections, and lost none, so it might reasonably have expected to continue making gains but for the truce. Under the electoral truce it held all its seats up to the summer of 1942, some of them without a contest, and in others overriding with little difficulty the opposition of Communist, Independent Labour Party, Pacifist, 'Stop-the-War', Fascist, and Independent candidates.

Evidence of local discontent emerged when the National Executive

<sup>33</sup> National Executive Committee, *Minutes* (20 Dec. 1939).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* (20, 21 Jan. 1941).

<sup>35</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1941), 21.

Committee reported to the 1941 party conference that the Kings Norton Labour Party had been suspended for breaching the truce by issuing a statement inviting electors not to vote for the Conservative candidate.<sup>36</sup> On 9 April 1942 Attlee told the National Executive Committee that, as leader, he had invited Labour Members of Parliament to speak for Sir James Grigg, the civil servant who had been appointed Secretary of State for War, and who was standing as a Conservative in the Cardiff by-election. He had received letters from the borough Labour party and from the regional organizer opposing his action as 'unwelcome and dangerous to the Movement in the area'. The Executive, of course, endorsed his action, but even that required a vote, 12 to 3. The following year the chairman of conference proposed that the Elections Sub-committee should have authority 'to take appropriate action' to maintain the truce and 'co-operation with the other Parties in the Government in returning Government candidates'. The reference back was moved and defeated only by the slim margin of 1,275,000 votes to 1,209,000.<sup>37</sup>

In the following year the truce took a beating. In June 1943 conference was told that over the year there had been twenty-six by-elections, of which eighteen had been contested. Only eight of them had been Labour seats. In six of these the Labour candidate had been unopposed, and the other two seats were held. The Conservatives, however, lost two seats, one to the Common Wealth Party, and one to an Independent, Tom Driberg, whose programme, on most issues, might have been that of a Labour candidate. In addition the Conservatives had come close to losing another seat to an Independent Socialist, and some of the six unsuccessful Common Wealth candidates had won substantial support.<sup>38</sup> These results tempted Labour Party members to speculate once more on what their party might have achieved without the truce. Conference was also informed that the Common Wealth Party had applied to be affiliated to the party, but had been ruled ineligible.<sup>39</sup> A delegate moved that notice be given to terminate the truce, but, after Morrison had assured the delegates that the passage of the resolution would entail the withdrawal of the Labour ministers from the coalition, it was defeated by a substantial majority.<sup>40</sup> Over the next twelve months the Labour Party held five seats in by-elections. In two of them the Labour candidate was unopposed. However, the Common Wealth Party took another seat from the Conservatives.<sup>41</sup> In 1945, prior to the general election, there were eight by-elections, two of them in Labour constituencies. Both were retained.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 126-9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* (1943), 145-6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 127.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), 17.

While the Communist Party had been opposing the war there was no possibility of pursuing the question of its affiliation to the Labour Party, or of any form of co-operation between the two parties. However, in 1942 the Communists, now ardently supporting the war effort, found enough support in the Labour Party for a resolution favouring co-operation between the two parties to be moved at conference, but not enough to avoid its overwhelming defeat, by 1,899,000 votes to 132,000. By contrast, a resolution in favour of withdrawing the government's ban on the publication of the *Daily Worker*, moved by the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, was carried by the narrow margin of 1,244,000 to 1,231,000.<sup>42</sup>

In the following year the Communist Party submitted a new application, pointing out that, with the dissolution of the Communist International, one of the objections to previous applications—that it was subject to orders from Russia—no longer applied. When the application came before the National Executive Committee, Shinwell and Laski put forward an alternative. While agreeing that the application could not be accepted, they wanted the Labour Party to be 'ready to enter into discussions with Socialist organisations . . . to achieve the Unity of the working class Movement on the basis of the principles and policy of the Labour Party'. This proposal was defeated by 14 votes to 2.<sup>43</sup> The issue of Communist affiliation was brought before conference again that year, when Lawther submitted a resolution from the Miners to accept Communist Party affiliation 'provided the Communist Party agrees to accept and abide by the constitution of the Labour Party'. When the rejection of this resolution was proposed, a delegate moved a rider to allow 'local co-operation . . . for specific purposes'. This was defeated on a show of hands, but in the vote on the direct issue of affiliation the Communists did considerably better than in the previous year. It was defeated by 1,951,000 to 712,000 votes.<sup>44</sup> In 1945 the same issue arose at conference again under the heading of 'Progressive Unity'. Resolutions on this topic had been excluded from the agenda under standing orders.<sup>45</sup> On behalf of the Engineers, Jack Tanner moved the reference back of the Conference Arrangements Committee's report, saying: 'If we are going to develop the power that is so necessary to win this General Election, and to carry, after it has taken place, a Government

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* (1942), 157.

<sup>43</sup> National Executive Committee, *Minutes* (28 May 1943).

<sup>44</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1943), 159.

<sup>45</sup> The relevant standing order read: 'When the Annual Party Conference has, by resolution, made a declaration of general Policy or Principle, no Resolution or motion concerning such Policy or Principle shall appear on the Agenda for a period of three years from the time such declaration was made, except such Resolutions or motion as are, in the opinion of the National Executive Committee, of immediate importance.'

which is going to represent Labour and Progressive Parties, then it seems to me we have got to make some arrangement.<sup>46</sup> The motion was defeated by 1,314,000 votes to 1,219,000.

One other individual deserves brief attention. Professor Harold Laski had been a member of the National Executive for many years. On many issues he took a similar line to Bevan's—for example on Order 1AA, but whereas Bevan had, as a Miners' Member of Parliament, some understanding of trade unions, and could, if he chose to try, win a favourable response from trade-unionists, Laski, an inveterate trouble-maker and romancer, almost invariably aroused trade union antipathy. In 1942 he submitted a memorandum to the National Executive Committee entitled 'The Party and the Future'. Attlee said that it

ignored the fundamental facts of the situation . . . There was no majority in the House for a Socialist policy or for a fundamental change in the economic organisation of this country. . . . Mr Laski was prepared to insist upon a minimum programme of measures being demanded from the Prime Minister, even at the risk of breaking up the Government.<sup>47</sup>

Later that year Laski wrote an article for *Reynolds News* criticizing the Labour ministers, and saying: 'No one . . . can point to any serious effort by Mr Attlee to make the idea of a partnership with the people a conscious part of the Prime Minister's policy. Big business has all the control in its hands; every source of privilege is stoutly defended; the old order makes all the pivotal appointments.'<sup>48</sup> He went on to propose that Bevin should take over from Attlee after the war. The inveterately loyal Bevin would not have thanked him for that. On 25 August 1943 the National Executive Committee considered an article by Laski 'in the American press' which attacked Attlee and the leaders of the Trades Union Congress. Its members signed a press statement dissociating themselves from it.<sup>49</sup> Laski did not give up. On 27 May 1945 he wrote to Attlee to tell him of the widespread feeling in the party 'that the continuance of your leadership of the Party is a grave handicap to our hopes of victory in the coming election'.<sup>50</sup>

### *Post-War Plans*

After their contributions to the war effort, the most important political activity of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress during the war was their planning for the post-war period. The Labour Party was

<sup>46</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1945), 81.

<sup>47</sup> National Executive Committee, *Minutes* (9 Apr. 1942).

<sup>48</sup> Issue of 12 July 1942. The article was quoted in the *Minutes* of the National Executive Committee for 12 Oct. 1942.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* (25 Aug. 1943). The article had been reprinted in the *Daily Telegraph* (3 Aug. 1943).

<sup>50</sup> Bullock, ii, 391.



first off the mark. On 30 July 1941 the Labour Party Central Committee on Reconstruction, with Shinwell as its chairman and Laski as its secretary, held its first meeting, and by its second meeting on 17 September ten subcommittees had been set up on the main areas of domestic policy. On 4 January 1942 the National Executive Committee noted that the Committee on Reconstruction had circulated a document in proof, entitled 'The Old World and the New Society', and that it had been approved for issue.<sup>51</sup> Thereafter little more was heard of the Committee on Reconstruction. The Standing Policy Sub-committee of the National Executive Committee, chaired by Dalton and with Morgan Phillips, the secretary of the Party's Research Department, as its secretary, was in firm control of plans for post-war reconstruction. It was assisted by a similar but not identical list of subcommittees. The Policy Sub-Committee invited the General Council to appoint two representatives to attend its meetings 'for the purpose of maintaining a liaison, with particular reference to Post-War Reconstruction'.<sup>52</sup> Citrine and Woodcock were appointed. Similarly, at the invitation of the General Council, Laski and Percy Collick, secretary of the National Executive Committee, had been appointed to attend meetings of the Council's Economic Committee.

The Economic Committee had been charged with preparing 'a general plan for the post-war reconstruction of the industries of this country', following a resolution moved by Bryn Roberts asking the General Council 'to prepare and circulate' such a plan, which was carried without opposition at the meeting of Congress in 1943.<sup>53</sup> To assist the committee in its task, Citrine sought the help of 'eminent economists known to be in sympathy with the aims of the Trade Union Movement'.<sup>54</sup> Three of them accepted, including Joan Robinson. The staff of the Research Department was also augmented by the addition of three new assistants, two of whom subsequently achieved eminence as academic experts in industrial relations: Allan Flanders, who became senior lecturer in industrial relations at Oxford University and subsequently a member of the Commission on Industrial Relations, and H. A. Turner, who was professor of industrial relations, first at Leeds University, and then at Cambridge. Of course the Labour Party's Policy Sub-committee and Congress's Economic Committee were not operating in virgin territory. In March 1941 the Labour Party had produced *Labour's Home Policy* which included proposals for both wartime and post-war measures, and this was followed by a whole series of reports, pamphlets, and resolutions on particular issues. The General Council

<sup>51</sup> See above.

<sup>53</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1943), 251.

<sup>52</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1944), 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), 394.

had published less, but Congress had at least matched the Labour Party conference in the number of its resolutions proposing post-war action on a wide range of social and political issues.

The government had also found time to set in motion some post-war planning, the most important example being the Beveridge report. The General Council claimed credit for having assisted in prompting this document. On 6 February 1942 a deputation from the Council's Social Insurance Committee saw the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland to urge immediate improvements in insurance benefits, and that 'a comprehensive plan should be in readiness for implementation immediately after the war'. Following this, on 22 May, the minister 'announced . . . that the Government were setting on foot at once a comprehensive survey of all our Social Insurance Schemes with a view to the preparation of plans for implementation at the end of the war'.<sup>55</sup> The task was undertaken by an Interdepartmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, which commissioned Sir William's report, published in December 1942. 'The General Council welcomed the Beveridge Report and were glad to note that it embodied a very high percentage of the points submitted in evidence to the Interdepartmental Committee, as set forth in . . . the Report to last year's Congress.'<sup>56</sup>

On one issue the unions had come into line with Beveridge's proposals just in time. Family allowances had been the subject of controversy in the Labour Movement since 1930. A joint committee of the party and Congress on the 'living wage' had then issued two reports: a majority report proposing an allowance of 25p a week for the first child from public funds, and 15p for each further child, up to school-leaving age; and a minority report which said that such allowances would affect wage negotiations detrimentally, and family allowances should wait until other social services had been provided. The General Council adopted the minority report, which was approved by a majority at Congress in September 1930. The following month the National Executive Committee recommended to its conference that, in view of the difference of opinion, the joint committee should continue its investigation of the matter. Nothing further was done until 1941 when the National Executive Committee submitted a new report on family allowances to its conference. It rejected the argument of the minority report of 1930, pointing out that 'during the past decade the bargaining strength of the Trade Unions has greatly increased, concurrently with a large expansion of the social services; and it appears improbable that the payment of children's allowances during the period would have weakened the

<sup>55</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1941), 144.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* (1943), 46.

unions in their bargaining powers'. It advocated a state allowance of 25p for each child, along with the abolition of income tax allowances for children who were eligible for the state allowances. Dukes moved the reference back of the report on the grounds that the authors were mistaken in their view that family allowances would not adversely affect wage negotiations; but he was persuaded by Dalton to withdraw his motion because the debate was 'only the beginning of a discussion which will be carried forward until some conclusion is reached acceptable to the great majority of our Movement'.<sup>57</sup>

That year the party conference had been held in June.<sup>58</sup> At Congress in September, George Chester proposed that the principle of family allowances be endorsed and the General Council authorized to formulate and agree a scheme with the National Executive Committee. At the end of the debate Deakin suggested that Congress should accept the reference back to the General Council 'with the instruction to report to a future conference on their findings'; and Chester accepted the proposal, which was agreed.<sup>59</sup> The General Council discussed the subject on 18 March 1942. Lawther and Alfred Roberts, of the Cardroom Amalgamation, proposed that family allowances be accepted 'in principle'. Deakin and Dukes opposed on the grounds that such allowances would affect wage negotiations adversely; but this argument no longer commanded a majority on the Council, and the proposal for non-contributory family allowances, paid directly by the state, with no means test, was adopted by 17 votes to 8. It reported this decision to Congress in September, but the item was so placed on the agenda that it was not reached until late on the last day. Deakin rose to complain of this arrangement, and to express 'the dissatisfaction of his organisation on this question of children's allowances . . . He urged Congress to make it perfectly clear to the General Council that they should keep a close watch on the development of the social services, and see that they did not suffer in the event of these allowances being provided for the children'.<sup>60</sup> No vote was taken. Thus the supporters of family allowances had achieved the remarkable feat of committing both the Labour Party conference and the Trades Union Congress to the introduction of family allowances without either body having recorded a vote in its favour!

Following the publication of the Beveridge report, the government issued two White Papers setting out its proposals on social insurance. They constituted a comprehensive system of insurance, in most respects

<sup>57</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1941), app. 4 and pp. 166-71.

<sup>58</sup> The date of the party conference has been moved from October to Whitsun from 1939 onwards.

<sup>59</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1941), 372-6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* (1942), 301-2.

closely following Beveridge's proposals.<sup>61</sup> The General Council welcomed the scheme, and felt 'it is not too much to say that it represents in its scope and comprehensiveness, one of the greatest single advances ever made in this or any other country in the development of social insurance.'<sup>62</sup> Another government White Paper was issued on *A National Health Service*,<sup>63</sup> which the General Council believed was 'a very big step forward and should be welcomed', subject to some reservations.<sup>64</sup> In relation to education, the government had gone beyond the stage of formulating proposals. In December 1943 the president of the Board of Education, R. A. Butler, had introduced an Education Bill which, in the view of the General Council, had laid 'the legislative foundations on the basis of which a comprehensive and coherent system of education can be built', although it had two important reservations: the bill provided a timetable for the raising of the school-leaving age from 14 to 15, but no firm date for a further rise to 16 years; and, although fees were to be abolished in all 'maintained' primary and secondary schools, they were to be allowed to continue in certain other classes of school.<sup>65</sup> The bill became law in August 1944.

In May 1944 the government had issued a White Paper on *Employment Policy*,<sup>66</sup> which was introduced in the House of Commons by Bevin. Although the General Council welcomed 'the statement of the White Paper that the maintenance of full employment is not only the primary aim, but is also primarily the responsibility of the Government', it found more to criticize in these proposals than in the government's post-war plans for social insurance, health, and education. It agreed with the government that the maintenance of full employment after the war would depend on an expansion in Britain's exports and on the avoidance of violent swings of investment in capital equipment, but felt that the government showed no grasp of the means necessary to make sure that these conditions would be achieved. What was needed was 'the public regulation and planning of our foreign trade as a whole', and 'a National Investment Board to ensure that there is a comprehensive planning of all forms of investment so that they are not subject in total to violent fluctuations'. The Council also criticized the White Paper's attitude to the budget. Although the government did not insist on an annual balancing of the budget, it proposed that it be balanced over a period of years; and it did not realize that the financial budget must be supplemented by a 'manpower budget' such as had formed the basis of economic planning during the war.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Social Insurance*, pts. 1 and 2, Cmd. 6550 and 6551, 1944.

<sup>62</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), app. B (i), p. 377.

<sup>64</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), app. B (ii), p. 381.

<sup>66</sup> Cmd. 6257, (1944).

<sup>63</sup> Cmd. 6502, 1944.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 73.

<sup>67</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), app. D, pp. 432-3.



These comments on the government's employment policy were contained in the General Council's 'Interim Report on Post-war Reconstruction' which it had approved for submission to Congress at its meeting on 26 July 1944. It was an uneven document, beginning with a substantial section on methods of government control over industries, with particular reference to nationalization. This was followed by a section on 'Prices and Living Standards'. The report then turned to full employment, beginning with the replies that the Economic Committee had given to a questionnaire submitted to them by Sir William Beveridge in connection with his study of the subject; followed by a 'Statement on Finance and Investment Policy', and ending with the committee's comments on the White Paper on *Employment Policy*.

In the first part of its report, the Economic Committee did not move far away from the recommendations of the report on 'The Public Control and Regulation of Industry and Trade' presented by the General Council to Congress in 1932, which had classified industries into three groups:

- (a) Those immediately ripe for socialisation.
- (b) Those less important or less unified but needing some measure of regulation in the public interest.
- (c) Those of minor importance which can be left for the time being under completely private enterprise.

In the first group the 1944 report put 'Fuel and power (including coal, gas and electricity)' but with no mention of oil; and 'Transport (including railways, canals, road transport, coastwise shipping, and internal airways)'. It proposed that coalmining and railways be nationalized first. Once both groups had been brought under public ownership, the iron-and-steel industry was to be next on the list. The cotton industry 'must be brought under public ownership but it is doubtful if that could or should be done immediately'.<sup>68</sup> This list of candidates for nationalization would have come as no surprise to anyone familiar with past resolutions of Congress and of Labour Party conferences on the subject.

Compensation was to be on the basis of 'net maintainable revenue', and the industries were to be managed by public corporations, whose members were to be appointed by, and to be responsible to, a minister, 'in order to ensure that the industries are conducted in full accordance with the Government's general plans for the maintenance of full employment, the control and location of industry, and the furtherance of socially desirable expansions of consumption'. It was also 'essential' that there should be 'proper provision for the representation and participation of workpeople, and to this end statutory provision should be made

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., appendix B, pp. 399-400.

for the interests of workpeople to be represented on the Governing Board'.<sup>69</sup> So long as this was done there would be no problem in providing for the participation of the worker 'in the affairs of industry in his place of work', since 'there would, of course, be no difficulty in ensuring that . . . Works' Councils were set up and consulted',<sup>70</sup> but fifteen paragraphs of tortured argument were required to show how the interests of workpeople were to be represented on the board. These referred back to the agreement between the General Council and the National Executive Committee in 1935 that 'the right of the workers' organisations to be represented on the Governing Boards of socialised industries and services . . . should be secured by Statute',<sup>71</sup> and pointed out that there had been 'no decision at that time as to how this principle should be implemented'. The report then asserted that it would not

be in the best interest of the workpeople of a nationalised industry to have, as directly representative of them, members of the controlling board who would be committed to its joint decisions. It will be essential, not only for the maintenance and improvement of the standards and conditions of the workpeople, but because of the power of independent criticism that they can exert, that the trade unions shall maintain their complete independence. Moreover . . . Members of the governing body cannot at the same time answer to the workers of the industry as their representatives and bear responsibility to the Minister for its administration.

How, then, could it be ensured 'that the views of the industry's workers on its management receive full consideration'?

This might be secured by nomination by workers' organisations of candidates from whom the Minister shall select a number of the Board members. The T.U.C. as representative of the viewpoint of organised workers in general, might serve as the best channel for this . . . The T.U.C. would, of course, consult with the appropriate Unions on the list of nominations. On the other hand, while those appointed should hold office for a definite period, it seems proper that they should surrender any position held in, or any formal responsibility to the Trade Unions.<sup>72</sup>

In this way the Economic Committee convinced itself, and the General Council, which endorsed its report, and Congress, which approved it, that the way to ensure 'the representation of workpeople through their organisations in the direction of public industries' was for the responsible minister to appoint to the boards of those industries trade union nominees, who would thereupon cease to have any responsibility to their union, and therefore cease to represent its members.

The report's proposal had in fact already been tested. When the

<sup>69</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), app. B. 400.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 413.

<sup>71</sup> See Ch. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), 411-12.

London Passenger Transport Board was established in 1934, John Cliff, formerly assistant secretary of the Transport and General Workers, had been appointed a member of the board, and had thereupon resigned his post in the union. There is no evidence to show that the employees of London Transport in general, or those who were members of the Transport and General Workers, believed that their interests 'were represented through their organisations in the direction of London Transport. The experience of the 1937 'Coronation' bus strike suggests that London busmen, at least, did not believe it.'<sup>73</sup> In introducing the report to Congress, George Chester, chairman of the Economic Committee, referred to 'the right of the workers, through their Trade Unions, to a share, maybe not an equal share, in the consideration of and determination of industrial policy',<sup>74</sup> but no other participant in the relatively brief debate made any mention of this aspect of the report.

The report also dealt with industries that were not yet ripe for nationalization, but should be subjected to public regulation. They included industries 'almost wholly in the hands of one combine or financial group' whose monopoly power had to be curbed; industries in the hands of 'relatively few large establishments' in which competition was 'an ineffective safeguard for the consumer'; industries, notably cotton and wool, 'which, for their efficient running, urgently require greater unification'; and industries 'characterised by the prevalence of small, independent producers, who may, however, have arrangements among themselves with regard to prices. Public regulation in these industries is required . . . to ensure that an adequate supply of good quality products at reasonable prices are [*sic*] available to the public.' There were not many industries that could not be found a place under one or other of these headings. Control in these industries could be exercised by the financial participation of the government in one or more companies, or by outright acquisition of a key supplier (for example of machinery), or by government wholesaling. In many instances, however, the appropriate form of control would be an industrial board, 'representative of all sections of the industry and . . . composed of representatives of workpeople and employers in the industry in equal proportion . . . presided over by a chairman appointed and paid by the Government for a definite period of years'.<sup>75</sup> At the apex of the whole structure of industrial organizations the report proposed a national industrial council representative of the General Council and the employers' organizations.<sup>76</sup>

The report had relatively little to say about price control and the

<sup>73</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 404-8.

<sup>74</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), 290.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 409.

protection of the consumer. Price control had been necessary in wartime 'to prevent the exploitation of scarcity. Under normal conditions the problem will be rather to prevent the artificial creation of scarcity and to restrain efforts to maintain prices . . . at levels not justified by costs.'<sup>77</sup> In addition 'a Consumers' Council might be established'.<sup>78</sup> In the section on finance and investment policy, the report proposed the retention of most of the wartime controls over the banks and the movement of capital. 'As a minimum, the Governor of the Bank of England should be directly appointed by the Minister responsible for the policy of the Bank to Parliament, and a Co-ordinating Committee should be set up to exercise general guidance over the Joint Stock Banks'.<sup>79</sup> In addition a national investment board should be established to 'secure comprehensive planning of all forms of investment in accordance with national and social needs and to provide funds for desirable new investment where these are not available from the banks or the normal capital market'.<sup>80</sup>

The Labour Party did not produce the final version of its post-war plan until April 1945, in time for the annual conference held from 21 to 25 May which learned on 23 May that the Prime Minister had resigned and asked for Parliament to be dissolved. In contrast to the General Council's 'Interim Report', the party's document was brief and readable, avoiding complex analysis and argument. Entitled *Let Us Face the Future*, it began with a tribute to the 'gallant men and women in the Fighting Services, in the Merchant Navy, Home Guard and Civil Defence, in the factories and in the bombed areas' who must not be robbed of 'a happier future than faced so many of them after the last war' when 'the "hard-faced men who had done well out of the war" were able to get the kind of peace which suited themselves'. In order to avoid a repetition of this disaster, the Labour Party 'stands for order as against the chaos which would follow the end of all public control'.<sup>81</sup>

All parties promised 'a high and rising standard of living, security for all against a rainy day, an educational system that will give every boy and girl a chance to develop the best that is in them'; but 'the Labour Party means it. For the Labour Party is prepared to achieve it by drastic policies of replanning and by keeping a firm constructive hand on our whole productive machinery.' Such control is necessary to provide 'jobs for all'.<sup>82</sup> Many of the detailed proposals for control were almost identical with those of the General Council's 'Interim Report'. They included public ownership of the fuel and power industries, of inland

<sup>77</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), 414.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 440.

<sup>81</sup> Labour Party, *Let Us Face the Future* (1945 General Election Programme), 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 3-4.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 417.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 441.



transport (but not coastal shipping) and iron and steel, and supervision of monopolies and cartels. In addition the party proposed 'a firm and clear-cut programme for the export trade . . . suitable economic and price controls', and 'better organisation of Government departments. . . . There must be priorities in the use of raw materials, food prices must be held, homes for the people must come before mansions, necessities for all before luxuries for the few.'<sup>83</sup> Agriculture would be encouraged and the Ministry of Food retained, along with 'factory canteens and British restaurants, free and cheap milk for mothers and children, fruit juices and food supplements', and these services would be improved and extended.<sup>84</sup> The powers of the government and local authorities to acquire land must be made 'wider and speedier' as a step towards land nationalization.<sup>85</sup> The Labour Party would raise the school-leaving age to 16 as soon as possible, and abolish all fees for secondary education, provide health centres as part of the National Health Service, and extend 'social insurance over the necessary wide field to all'.<sup>86</sup> Labour's international policy would aim to secure a lasting peace and 'world-wide prosperity'.<sup>87</sup> Finally the document pointed out that, although a number of parties were going to take part in the coming election, 'by and large Britain is a country of two parties', and if all 'progressives' were to combine, they could ensure that there would be a Labour government.<sup>88</sup>

In contrast to the brief and unexciting debate of the General Council's report on post-war reconstruction in September 1944, the Labour Party Conference in May 1945 spent four days debating *Let Us Face the Future*, and relevant resolutions, with considerable interest and even excitement. One reason for the contrast is that when the Labour Party met the delegates knew that a general election could not be far away, and before they left the date of the election had been announced; so that they were discussing what was to be their election manifesto. Another reason is that *Let Us Face the Future* is a readable document, and all or many of the delegates had evidently read it; whereas the 'Interim Report on Post-war Reconstruction' is almost unreadable, and there was little evidence at the 1944 Congress that delegates had studied its contents.

### *Trade Union Reconstruction*

At the 1942 meeting of Congress the Railwaymen proposed that the General Council examine trade union structure to find where competition existed, whether it was uneconomic, and where policy was 'diverse

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 6-7.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 7-8.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 9-10.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 12.

within an industry' with a view to discovering 'the advisability of alteration of the constitution of Unions where it can be shown that their present basis of improving the conditions of employment of their members is ineffective'.<sup>89</sup> The mover described his resolution as 'non-controversial'. Citrine did not agree. 'It started', he said, 'from a false premise . . . that it is possible to plan the future of Trade Unionism in this country, and secondly, that, having made their plans, they could get their organisations to conform to that plan'.<sup>90</sup> Congress rejected the proposal, by 3,085,000 votes to 2,153,000. The following year the proponents of reforming trade union structure tried again. The Distributive and Allied Workers moved that the General Council undertake an examination of union structure 'with special regard to: (a) Uneconomic overlapping and competition. (b) What amalgamations are desirable. (c) Structural or other changes necessary to ensure maximum Trade Union efficiency in the future.'<sup>91</sup> Apart from its greater brevity and clarity, this resolution did not seem to differ markedly from its predecessor of the previous year, but no one spoke against it and it passed by the comfortable majority of 3,877,000 to 1,899,000.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps Citrine had decided that it was time to allow the advocates of reform to discover the difficulty of the task for themselves.

Citrine was an authority on the matter. One of the first jobs he was given after his appointment as assistant secretary to Congress in 1923 was to draw up a scheme for the reorganization of British trade unions 'by scientific linking up of same to present a united front'. He presented a masterly analysis of the structure of British unions to Congress in 1925, arguing that the development of federations of unions was the most likely means to a united front, which nevertheless baffled the delegates. For the next four years the General Council strove to encourage the formation of federations, or, as a first step, 'joint working arrangements', with extremely meagre results.<sup>93</sup> In 1943 the task was given to the Organization Committee. It prepared a report for the 1944 Congress, which, like the report on post-war reconstruction, also presented that year, was an interim report without a sequel: 'The Interim Report on Trade Union Structure and Closer Unity.'<sup>94</sup> The committee went back to the General Council's report of 1927, which had followed on Citrine's document, and showed how little it had been able to achieve. The one important success that it could point to was the development by the General Council of advisory councils and committees for groups of unions: unions organizing women, non-manual workers, nursing, local government, the tobacco industry, insurance

<sup>89</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1942) 161.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* (1943), 169.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 174.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 165-6.

<sup>94</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), app. A, p. 341.

<sup>93</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 455-6.

unions, and engineering and shipbuilding. It quoted with approval the account of the difficulties of achieving amalgamation given in the 1927 report, and the history of the failure of the General Council's attempts to promote amalgamations. All this led the committee to the conclusion that *'The outstanding fact is that the only solution to our problem is that the Unions themselves must strive for closer unity and resolutely pursue that end, probably making some sacrifices on the way, until it is achieved. That fact has been known for a long time. But it has still to be faced.'*<sup>95</sup> To help the unions in this task, it suggested that attention be concentrated on trade union functions, such as recruitment, research, and education, to see how far these could be advantageously handled on a federal basis. Congress accepted the report.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the justified pessimism of the report, there were some instances at the time of unions 'striving for closer unity'. Since 1942 the Miners' executive had been working on a scheme to convert its federation of district unions into a single unified trade union. It presented its proposals to the 1943 conference of the federation. Previous schemes had foundered on the rocks of wide differences between the districts in their rules and procedures and in their contributions and benefits—other than dispute benefit, which was already handled by the federation. On this occasion the executive proposed that a standard contribution be paid by each member to the proposed national union, which would take over the payment of the salaries of officials and staff, the expenses of authorized meetings and negotiations, legal and other charges relating to workmen's compensation, and allowances to the branches for authorized expenses. Contributions above the standard figure for benevolent purposes were to be matters for the districts and the branches. As for rules and procedures, new model rules were to be devised during the first twelve months of the new union's existence. The interests of existing officials and staff were protected: all were to be retained on their existing salaries and conditions for the first twelve months while a standard scale of salaries and remuneration was devised. The age of retirement was to be 65.

The main issue for debate at the conference was the level of the national contribution. The executive recommended 2p a week, which was accepted, along with a capitation fee of £1 a head from district funds to give the new union a fund of its own. The whole scheme was then submitted to the districts. After they had done their work, it was to be reconsidered at a special conference, which, after delays, met on 16 August 1944. The amount of the contribution was debated again, and slightly reduced.<sup>97</sup> The delegates discussed whether it should be one of

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 359.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 230.

<sup>97</sup> From 5d. to 4½d. (old money).

the new union's objects to secure 'a national wage agreement with national ascertainment covering the whole of the British coalfield',<sup>98</sup> and decided that it should. Another debate was over a rule which attempted to make secession as difficult as possible.<sup>99</sup> The next stage was a ballot of the members of the federation. The result, more than ten to one in favour, was announced on 16 November 1944, and the National Union of Mineworkers came into existence on 1 January 1945. District chauvinism was to continue to play a substantial part in the new union, but at least it was more restrained than it had been in the federation.

Proposals for amalgamation between the Distributive and Allied Workers and the Shop Assistants had been under discussion for a good many years, but they 'came to the boil in 1944'.<sup>100</sup> Terms were agreed in December 1944. They had fewer problems to resolve than the Miners. The Shop Assistants were content to join forces with a union whose membership in the co-operative wholesale factories took them far outside the field of distribution; and differences in contributions and benefits were dealt with by agreeing that the contributions and benefits of the Distributive and Allied Workers should continue to apply to their former members in the new union and to all new entrants, while the Shop Assistants' former members could choose either to continue on their own scales or to transfer to those of the Distributive and Allied Workers. Hallsworth, the secretary of the Distributive and Allied Workers, which was by a considerable margin the larger of the two unions, became the secretary of the new union, and G. M. Hann, secretary of the Shop Assistants, was designated one of the two assistant secretaries, but before the new union began operation he left to become a member of the Industrial Court. Conferences of the two unions, meeting separately, accepted the proposals in 1945, which then went to a ballot of the members. They were carried overwhelmingly in both unions, and the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers started operations on 1 January 1947. One problem remained. Each branch of the former Distributive and Allied Workers had been entitled to send a delegate to their annual conference, yielding a total of over 1,000 delegates, and the new union had over 2,000 branches. In May 1948 a special rule-making conference debated a proposal to group branches with less than 250 members for conference representation; but 'the strong democratic tradition'<sup>101</sup> of the Distributive and Allied Workers carried an amendment favouring one delegate from each branch with an

<sup>98</sup> Arnot, 418.

<sup>99</sup> If a district was expelled, the national union was authorized to constitute a new district of the members who remained loyal to it, with its own officers and committees. The delegates no doubt had the 'industrial unions' in Nottingham and South Wales in mind.

<sup>100</sup> Richardson, 166.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 172.



additional delegate for branches with over 500 members. Soon after its formation the new union mopped up three small unions of butchers, abattoir workers, and slaughtermen by the process of transfer of engagements provided by the Societies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act of 1940. .

The Engineers also 'strove for closer unity', but with no more than meagre results. At the end of the First World War, their predecessors, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, had joined with nine smaller unions of engineering craftsmen to form the Amalgamated Engineering Union. The latter union now tried to repeat the performance by calling a conference with sixteen smaller engineering unions in November 1943; but its only success was the accession of two small unions with no more than a few thousand members between them.<sup>102</sup>

Another level of trade union structure in which the General Council was more than usually concerned during the war was the international trade union movement. The German conquest in Europe had left the Trades Union Congress, the American Federation of Labor and the Swedish trade union federation as the only front-rank members of the International Federation of Trade Unions, the headquarters of which had been transferred to London, along with its secretary, Walter Schevenels. The international trade secretariats, such as the International Miners' Federation and the International Transport Workers' Federation, had also suffered as a result of the war, and during 1940-1 discussions took place on 'some kind of fusion or federation of the IFTU and the Secretariats', and a subcommittee representing both the federation and the secretariats was set up to formulate proposals.<sup>103</sup>

However, before these negotiations were concluded, the German invasion of the Soviet Union brought a new and potentially disruptive development. On behalf of the General Council, Citrine proposed to Congress in September 1941 that an Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee be established of equal numbers of representatives of Congress and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions of the Soviet Union to hold regular meetings alternately in each country. The Soviets promptly agreed to an Anglo-Soviet Committee, and British representatives attended the first meeting of the committee in Moscow, which began on 15 October 1941, but 'Owing to the acute military situation' had to be transferred to Kuibishev a few days later. The meeting agreed a list of means 'of mutual assistance in the war against Hitlerite Germany'.<sup>104</sup> The Soviet members of the committee paid a return visit to London in January 1942. At this meeting the British

<sup>102</sup> Jefferys, 263-4.

<sup>103</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1941), 135-6.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* (1942), 58-9.

proposed an approach to the American Federation of Labor to join the committee to make it a tripartite body representing trade unions in the three main Allied powers, and the Soviets agreed. It was also hoped that the American delegation to the tripartite committee would include the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which had developed into a powerful body of unions organizing on an industrial basis in contrast to the occupational organization of the Federation of Labor, and the Railway Brotherhoods, which held aloof from both these bodies.

Citrine went to Washington in May 1942 to discuss these proposals with the Americans. In his report to Congress in September, he explained that

The American Federation of Labor have consistently asserted that there are no legitimate trade unions in the Soviet Union, and on those grounds have always opposed the admission of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions . . . into the International Federation of Trade Unions. The inevitable result of such an affiliation, it was claimed, would be to stimulate Communist forces in other countries, including the United States.<sup>105</sup>

Given this background it was not surprising that the Americans declined the invitation; but they did propose the formation of an Anglo-American Trade Union Committee of representatives of the American Federation of Labor and of the Trades Union Congress which, they suggested, would enable the British, through their membership of the Anglo-Soviet Committee, to liaise between the Americans and the Soviets. Because 'of the attitude of the Executive of the American Federation of Labor', Citrine could not enter into negotiations with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, but he met Philip Murray, president of that body, to explain the situation.<sup>106</sup> When Citrine returned, the General Council decided to go ahead with the formation of the Anglo-American Trade Union Committee, but to consult the Soviets before officially committing themselves. After a delay of several weeks, Shvernik, the secretary of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, cabled that it was 'within the competence' of Congress to decide to set up an Anglo-American Trade Union Committee, but the suggestion that the British should act as a liaison with the Soviet unions 'was not acceptable to them'. The General Council then agreed to go ahead but to make further representations to the Americans concerning the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Railway Brotherhoods.<sup>107</sup>

A meeting of the Anglo-American Committee was arranged for February 1943 in Washington, but the British representatives went first to Miami to meet the executive of the American Federation of Labor on

<sup>105</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1942), 63-4.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 64-5.

<sup>107</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (3 Sept. 1942).

27 January to press the case for the inclusion of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Railway Brotherhoods. They achieved nothing. They were told that 'The TUC must choose between associating with the American Federation of Labor through a Joint Committee, or . . . establishing some such connection with the C.I.O.' On 10 and 11 February the joint committee met in Washington. Immediately afterwards the British met representatives of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, who, they hoped,

would have been willing to take some positive steps to initiate discussions with the A.F. of L. or to make some concrete suggestions whereby joint collaboration with the British T.U.C. could be obtained. Nothing of the kind was, however, forthcoming. As to the C.I.O. claim for equal status with the A.F. of L., the information furnished to the Delegation by them was wholly insufficient to substantiate their claim.

Some comfort, however, was forthcoming from the Railway Brotherhoods. Their representatives 'expressed their sincere thanks' to the British representatives, 'stating that they felt the TUC had done all they possibly could to solve a most difficult problem'.<sup>108</sup>

Citrine reported on these discussions to the meeting of the Anglo-Soviet Committee held in Moscow in June 1943, where the Soviets may in their turn have upset the British representatives, by expressing their 'perplexity that strikes should still occur during this life and death struggle against Fascism, and their anxiety that a Second Front should be established in Europe'. The British delegates replied that the time lost in strikes in Britain was less than an hour per worker a year, and that all strikes 'were discontinued by the unions'; and that the second front was a matter for 'the highest military and other authorities'.<sup>109</sup> A more important issue of contention between the British and the Soviets was settled at Congress in 1944. Since the beginning of the war the British Labour Movement had been opposed to a repetition, after the war was won, of the harsh treatment of the Germans in 1919.<sup>110</sup> This attitude had been confirmed at Congress in 1943, when Dukes asked the delegates to declare that 'the German nation has perpetrated inhuman crimes against the people in all the Occupied Countries and against the Jewish race in particular'. An amendment substituting 'Nazis' for 'German people' was carried on a show of hands.<sup>111</sup> When the Anglo-Soviet Committee met in October 1944, it noted this resolution, but 'the majority . . . felt that the German people could not be absolved from all responsibility for the crimes which had been committed'.<sup>112</sup> When

<sup>108</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1943), 81-5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 86.

<sup>110</sup> See above.

<sup>111</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1943), 329-33.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), app. C, p. 386.

Congress met later that month, Citrine made a robust defence of this opinion. The criminals, he said, could not make the necessary reparations to our devastated allies. They would be executed or imprisoned. 'If they [the delegates] accepted the principle that the German people were to be acquitted of all blame, they could not with justice demand reparations. If on the other hand it was believed that restoration and reparation were just and equitable, it followed that such reparation must be done by the German people as a whole'.<sup>113</sup>

At Congress in 1943 Citrine had proposed a resolution which emphasized the need for organized workers to have 'a voice in the settlement of the terms and conditions of peace' and, to this end, instructed the General Council to consider calling a 'World Conference of the representatives of the organised workers of all countries as soon as war conditions permit', thus shifting the discussion of trade union unity on to a far higher plane than co-operation between the Soviets, the British, and the three trade union bodies in the United States.<sup>114</sup> The resolution was adopted, and the General Council proceeded to issue invitations, but the government could not guarantee the travel facilities needed for such a conference, and it was postponed.

However, the Emergency International Trade Union Council of the International Federation of Trade Unions continued to meet, and on 30 March 1944 approved a report on 'International Trade Union Reconstruction' which envisaged a World Federation of Trade Unions, with a dual structure. Each trade union was to be represented in the World Federation through two channels: its national trade union centre, and the appropriate international trade department, the latter replacing the relevant trade secretariat. The International Congress, consisting of approximately equal numbers of delegates from the national centres and from the trade departments, was to meet every third year, and was to elect a general council, also of approximately equal numbers from its two branches; and there was also to be an executive council of twelve, six from each branch. Other proposals dealt with regional conferences, fees, and plans for a transitional period.<sup>115</sup> In addition the Emergency International Trade Union Council had approved a report on the 'Social and Economic Demands of the International Trade Union Movement in the Post-War World'.<sup>116</sup>

The World Trade Union Conference finally met in London on 6 February 1945 with 164 delegates and forty observers from sixty-three trade union organizations. The task of drafting a constitution for the

<sup>113</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), app. C, p. 253-68. Walter Padley, of the Distributive and Allied Workers, moved the reference back of the relevant paragraphs of the report of the Anglo-Soviet committee, but his motion was defeated by a vote of nearly four to one.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* (1943), 287-8.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), 104-7.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* 107-9.



new organization was delegated to an 'administrative committee' with two representatives each from Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, Latin America, and the International Federation of Trade Unions, and one each for China and for the international trade secretariats as a body. From start to finish, the whole process of the conference and drafting revealed a number of issues of pride, precedence, and protocol. Even before the conference met, the preparatory committee, which was to have consisted of representatives of Britain, the Soviet Union, and both the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, had to meet without a representative of the American Federation of Labor, which also informed the committee that it would not be sending a delegation to the conference. It was the federation's view that the conference should have been convened by the International Federation of Trade Unions, and not by the Trades Union Congress. The latter replied that the International Federation would have had 'considerable difficulty' in acting as convener since 'many organisations were not affiliated to the International'.<sup>117</sup> The real point was that the Soviets and the Congress of Industrial Organizations were not members of the International Federation, and the American Federation of Labor wanted them to be excluded from the World Federation as well, whereas the British wanted them both to be included.

The most controversial issue for the administrative committee to settle was the status of the trade secretariats in the World Federation. Since the conference and the committee consisted almost entirely of representatives of national trade union centres, the dual structure proposed by the Emergency International Trade Union Council stood no chance of acceptance. Initially 'there was an almost unanimous view . . . that the Proposed World Federation should be based exclusively upon national centres' and, while trade departments were to be established they should be excluded from 'any voice in the policy of the World Federation'. Eventually, however, the British, along with Walter Schevenels, and the sole representative of the secretariats on the committee, secured a compromise whereby 'Trade Departments would be set up within the Federation to be under the control of Congress, the General Council and the Executive Committee, each Trade Department to have one representative and, in the event of a vote by show of hands, one vote in the Congress and the General Council, but no vote in the event of a card roll-call vote.'<sup>118</sup> In addition, the Executive Committee was to include three members from candidates proposed by the trade departments. The remaining representatives on this committee

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* (1945), 101.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 107.

were to be two each for Britain and France, and three each for the Soviet Union, and the rest of Europe (one of the latter to be for the Scandinavian countries), two each for the United States and Latin America, and one each for Africa, China, and the Pacific.

One of the decisions of the World Conference had been that the trade union movement should be represented at all stages in the making of the peace settlement, and in particular that 'accredited representatives of the Trade Union Movement will be received . . . at the forthcoming San Francisco Conference in an advisory and consultative capacity'.<sup>119</sup> It wanted the powers that were convening the conference to consult with the administrative committee of the World Trade Union Conference, and the national delegations to include trade union representatives in a consultative capacity. On 23 February 1945, Citrine, along with his colleagues from the United States, the Soviet Union, and China, put this proposal to the Foreign Secretary, Eden, and the ambassadors of those three countries, along with the French ambassador. Only Eden rejected the proposal outright, 'saying that it must be assumed that the Government represented the whole of the people and no Government could attend an international conference with confidence unless it felt it did possess such authority'.<sup>120</sup> Subsequently, Citrine put the case to Eden again, this time with two Labour ministers, Attlee and George Hall, present. They promised to report to the Cabinet, which agreed with Eden. Nevertheless, a British trade union delegation left for San Francisco, where it learned that most other governments attending the conference had granted their trade unions some form of consultative capacity. Citrine then called all his resources to his aid. The British trade union delegation first met the Labour ministers who were attending the conference, and then with Eden and Attlee. In London the chairman of Congress, George Isaacs, and Vincent Tewson went to see Churchill, who was also questioned about the matter in the House of Commons; all to no avail. Moreover the administrative committee of the World Federation of Trade Unions was also refused consultative status by the United Nations Conference.<sup>121</sup>

The General Council took its grievance to the Labour Party conference at Blackpool where it met the National Executive Committee on 23 May, with Attlee present. It told its party colleagues that it did not think its claim to 'the fullest right to consultation upon all subjects affecting the well being of the Trade Unionist' was completely understood. Dukes proposed a joint committee to discuss the matter, and some of his colleagues 'also expressed some disquietude at the

<sup>119</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1945), 118.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 120-5.

possibility of the attitude being taken up by some sections of the Labour Party that the Trade Union Movement should have access to the Government only through the Labour Party'. Afterwards the General Council met separately and proposed that two joint committees be set up: one to consider 'policy' and 'the best means of giving effect to it'; and the second on measures of special interest to trade-unionists, including a forty-hour working week, two weeks' holiday with pay, an improved Workmen's Compensation Act, and a guaranteed working week.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, the agitation for representation at the United Nations was not without effect. When the United Nations Organization met in London early in 1946, the Labour government agreed to include two representatives of Congress 'to serve in an advisory capacity with the British delegation'.<sup>123</sup>

### *The General Election of 1945*

The parliament elected in 1935 would have expired in November 1940 without the passage of a prolongation bill to keep it in existence. Further such bills were carried in each successive year to 1944. In that year Churchill himself moved the second reading, saying that it 'would be the last of its kind; and that the end of the war in Europe would be a signal for the ending of the Parliament'.<sup>124</sup> But when on 7 May 1945 the German army surrendered, Churchill appears to have changed his mind. On 18 May he wrote to the leaders of the other parties in the coalition government suggesting that either they continue until the end of the Japanese war (which was then expected to last for some months at least, and possibly a year or more) or an election be held in July. On 21 May Attlee read this letter to the delegates at the party conference in a private session. The chairman then took a vote on whether the Labour ministers should remain in the government until the end of the Japanese war. Only two delegates voted in favour.<sup>125</sup>

On the same day Attlee replied to Churchill, reminding him that when he introduced the Prolongation Bill in the previous autumn, he

<sup>122</sup> General Council, *Minutes* (23 May 1945).

<sup>123</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1946), 157.

<sup>124</sup> R. M. McCallum and Alison Readman, *The General Election of 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 2.

<sup>125</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1945), 87. The National Executive Committee had taken the same view. Kenneth O. Morgan reports: 'It is known that Attlee, Bevin, and (more surprisingly) Dalton were all opposed to an immediate departure from the coalition. But Morrison . . . spoke strongly against. So, too, and with much effect, did William Whiteley, the chief whip' (*Labour in Power, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 36). Bevin, of course, was not a member of the National Executive Committee.

said that the end of the German war should be 'a pointer which will fix the date of the next election'. Attlee went on to say that he and his colleagues would prefer an election in the autumn to an election in July because the electoral roll would then have been revised. Moreover, by then the service electors would have had more time to get to know about their candidates and the issues, and service candidates would also have had more time to present themselves to their electors. In any event they did not agree that the coalition should carry on until the end of the Japanese war.<sup>126</sup> Only the National Liberals supported that proposal. The coalition was at an end. Churchill refused to delay the election to the autumn. On 23 May he resigned, and agreed to form a caretaker government pending the election result. Parliament was to be dissolved on 15 June, and the election was to be held on 5 July.

This was the first British election in which public-opinion polls were used to sample the opinions of the electors and to forecast the results. Not too much attention was paid to them by the politicians, but the accuracy with which the *News Chronicle* Gallup poll foretold the outcome guaranteed that its findings would be heeded in future. It was also the first British general election to be the subject of a Nuffield College election study, which recorded many aspects of and developments in the campaign.<sup>127</sup> According to this study, the Conservatives paid special attention to foreign affairs, including the conduct of the Japanese war, whereas the Labour Party concentrated on domestic issues. The two parties did not differ greatly over foreign policy, but Labour tried to emphasize the gulf between them on domestic issues, calling attention to what it presented as the sorry record of the Conservatives in the thirties, and contrasting it with its own five-year plan set out in *Let Us Face the Future*. The Conservatives, it asserted, had no plan. Churchill claimed that the Conservatives had a plan, a four-year plan, which included the various White Papers published by the coalition government and the Butler Education Act. He 'assured the electors that "this plan had now been shaped", but so far no one had seen it in writing'. There was apparently a sharp difference between them in their approach to economic planning. Labour 'declared its intention of planning or replanning the whole economy' whereas the Conservatives intended 'to leave individual enterprises with the maximum freedom to make their own plans'.<sup>128</sup> For the electors the foremost issue 'especially in the blitzed cities, was housing'; and the Gallup poll found that 42 per cent of its sample considered that Labour would handle housing best, whereas only 25 per cent thought the Conservatives would handle it best.<sup>129</sup> 'A

<sup>126</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1945), 87.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 51-3.

<sup>127</sup> McCallum and Readman.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* 241-2.



further difference between the attitudes of the two parties . . . was that the Conservatives were concentrating more on the needs of the moment, while the Labour party were looking ahead to long-term problems. . . . The Conservative party was mainly concerned to produce goods that were urgently needed there and then . . . The Labour party . . . on the other hand, was largely concerned with the maintenance of full employment, the sustaining of the level of purchasing power, and the avoidance of trade depression.<sup>130</sup>

The General Council had expected the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act to be a serious election issue. Citrine told his colleagues that, despite the resolution passed by Congress, without dissent, the previous October committing them to complete repeal, he wanted to limit their claim to the repeal of sections 5 and 6, curbing the right of Civil Service unions to associate with other bodies and that of public authorities generally to impose a closed shop. If they sought complete repeal now, he said, 'the Conservatives would claim that the Trade Union Movement were desirous of organising a general strike and would seek to make that a first-class political issue'. Lawther proposed they should also seek the repeal of section 4 restricting payment of the political levy to those who had 'contracted in', but his motion was lost by 13 votes to 9. There were only three votes for honouring the commitment to complete repeal. In the end the chairman proposed that, while they favoured complete repeal, 'the Labour Party should press at the election for the removal of Clauses 5 and 6 as a preliminary measure', and this was agreed.<sup>131</sup> Whether or not it was as a result of this caution, the Act was not an important election issue. McCallum and Readman make no mention of it. Indeed they do not include any issue relating directly to the unions as an election issue.

Professor Laski could be relied on to stir up trouble. Churchill invited Attlee to accompany him to his meeting with Roosevelt and Stalin arranged for July. Laski issued a statement as chairman of the National Executive Committee:

It is, of course, essential that if Mr Attlee attends this gathering he shall do so in the role of observer only. Obviously it is desirable that the leader of the party which may shortly be elected to govern the country should know what is said, discussed and agreed at this vitally important meeting. On the other hand, the Labour party cannot be committed to any decisions arrived at.

Churchill wrote to Attlee to say that he had intended him to attend the conference as 'friend and adviser', not as a 'mute observer'. Attlee replied that there was 'never any suggestion that I should go as a mere observer'. Several Conservative spokesmen tried to make capital out of

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 144-9.

the issue, but 'it left the great mass of the electorate surprisingly uninterested',<sup>132</sup> perhaps because the Labour Party had repeatedly warned them to expect 'Tory stunts', or perhaps because Laski's capacity for getting things wrong was generally appreciated.

The poll had been postponed in twenty-three seats in the North and in Scotland because of traditional local holidays or fairs. The count was therefore delayed until 27 July. When it was completed, Labour had won 393 seats, against 189 seats for the Conservatives, or 213 seats if those of their Ulster Unionist, National, and National Liberal allies were added in. The Liberals had twelve seats, the Irish Nationalists two, the Independent Labour Party three, the Communists two, Common Wealth one, and fourteen independent Members were returned. Labour had received 11,992,292 votes, the Conservatives 8,665,566, or, if the votes of their allies are included, 9,960,809 votes. The Liberal Party had 2,239,668. The Labour Party had, therefore, not secured an absolute majority of the votes; although by adding the votes of the Common Wealth Party, the Independent Labour Party, the Communist Party, the Scottish Nationalists, and those of the independents who could be classified as 'socialistic'. Comparing its total with the votes of all the other parties, McCallum and Readman find a 'balance in favour of Socialism' of 65,880.<sup>133</sup> However, there could be no doubt that Labour had won the election handsomely.

This outcome was established by 7 p.m. that evening. Soon afterwards Churchill saw the king to tender his resignation. He was followed by Attlee to kiss hands, and then to hurry off to Potsdam to continue the conference there, now with Stalin and Truman, Roosevelt having died on 12 April.

<sup>132</sup> McCallum and Readman, 144-9.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* 252.

## The Labour Government 1945-1951

### *The Unions after the War*

The growth of British trade union membership which had begun in 1934 continued during the war to a peak of 8.17 million in 1943 (40.4 per cent of the labour force). Thereafter there was a pause with the beginning of the run-down in the production of armaments, but growth resumed in 1945 when the total rose to 8.80 million (43.0 per cent). By 1951 it had risen to 9.53 million (45.0 per cent). Apart from a marginal rise in the following year, that figure of union density was not matched again until 1970. By comparison, from 1911 to 1918 growth had been from 3.13 million to 6.46 million, and the peak came in 1920, with 8.25 million, followed by a long decline to 4.35 million in 1933. Not all trade-unionists were members of unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. In 1945 affiliated membership was 6.58 million; by 1951 the figure was 7.83 million. The proportion of British trade union members affiliated to Congress therefore rose from less than three-quarters in 1945 to well over four-fifths in 1951. This increase was mainly due to the repeal in 1946 of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 which had prevented Civil Service unions from affiliating to Congress. The authority of Congress was thereby enhanced, although the Civil Service unions had paid attention to Congress opinions and decisions even while they were debarred from membership.

These overall figures of union growth give little indication of the far more substantial changes in the distribution of union membership between industries and unions. Table 2 sets out the figures for certain important industries for 1938 and 1948. Trade union membership can grow or decline in two ways: numbers employed may rise or fall with the proportion of employees who are union members remaining constant; and the proportion of employees who are union members (trade union density) may fluctuate without an alteration in the number of employees. In practice, of course, both changes are likely to be at work at the same time, either counteracting or reinforcing each other. Should trade union density in an area of employment reach 100 per cent, union growth can occur only by means of an increase in the work-force.

In 1938 coalmining and the docks were approaching this limit. Nevertheless, the unions in both industries managed to increase their densities a little by 1948—but in both of them there was a decline in

TABLE 2. Trade union membership and density for selected industries, 1938 and 1948

Category	1938			1948			
	Union membership (000s)	Employment (000s)	Union density (%)	Union membership (000s)	Employment (000s)	Union density (%)	Membership growth (%)
Total	5,969	19,352	30.8	9,118	20,270	45.0	53
Manual	4,614	—	—	7,956	—	—	53
White-collar	1,355	—	—	2,062	—	—	52
Male	5,070	13,236	38.3	7,468	13,485	55.4	47
Female	899	6,116	14.7	1,650	6,785	24.3	85
Coalmining	736	914	80.6	691	800	86.4	-5
Metals and engineering	912	2,802	32.5	1,914	3,514	54.5	110
Cotton, flax and man-made fibres	294	524	56.1	274	350	78.3	-8
Printing and publishing	160	324	49.4	207	273	75.8	29
Construction	430	1,497	28.7	611	1,326	46.1	42
Railways	385	573	67.2	475	535	88.7	23
Road transport	308	426	72.2	482	520	92.6	57
Sea transport	78	139	55.9	113	151	74.9	45
Ports and inland water transport	142	169	84.1	140	151	92.9	-1
Distribution	250	2,355	10.6	326	2,089	15.6	30
Local government and education	662	—	—	861	1,241	69.4	30
Health services	71	—	—	223	522	42.6	214
National government	186	—	—	400	709	56.5	115
Posts and tele-communications	208	—	—	258	324	79.6	25

Source: Bain and Price, 39-78.



employment which outweighed the effect of this increased density, so union membership declined. By 1938 the cotton unions had achieved a union density considerably higher than average, and were able to raise it further, but a substantial decline in the cotton labour force brought a decline in union membership. Printing and the railways were two other industries with relatively high union densities before the war which experienced a decline in employment over the next ten years. However, their unions had more room than the unions in coalmining and the docks to increase their density, and did so to the extent that union membership increased considerably in both industries, but not by as much as the overall increase in trade union membership. There were two industries with relatively high pre-war union densities that nevertheless increased during the war: shipping and road transport. In shipping the increase in density was not quite enough to raise the rate of union growth above the national average; but in road transport union density had by 1948 reached the remarkable figure of 92.6 per cent (surpassed only by the docks), and the percentage increase in union membership was above the national average.

If so many industries that started with relatively high figures of union density fell behind the overall rate of union growth for the period, or even declined, it might be supposed that industries that started out with relatively low figures of union density would have grown faster than the overall rate. There is, however, no such industry among those selected for inclusion in the table. There are two industries with lower than average figures for trade union density in 1938: construction and distribution. But both of them fell short of the overall rate of union growth over the next ten years. In both cases the unions suffered from special problems of recruitment, due to the dispersion of their labour forces because the average size of the unit of employment was unusually small; in distribution the majority of employees were women; and in construction employment was predominantly casual. There are only four industries in the table with faster than average rates of growth over the period. They are road transport, metals and engineering, national government, and the health services. In 1938 union density in road transport was well above the average, and in metals and engineering it was just above the average. Figures for union density in 1938 in national government and the health services are lacking; but it seems plausible that union density would then have been above the average in national government, and below it in the health services.

Given the pace of rearmament in the immediate pre-war years, and the further rapid expansion during the war, it is not surprising that the metals-and-engineering group of industries enjoyed the fastest growth in trade union membership of all British industries during the war, but it

is a tribute to the success of reconversion to peacetime production that the inevitable decline in the engineering labour force which followed was rapidly reversed in the post-war years. Union membership in the industry peaked at 1,970,000 in 1943, but by 1948 it was back to 1,914,000. Union density rose from just under a third in 1938 to over half the work-force in 1948, and because employment in the industry also increased, the rate of increase in trade union membership was more than twice that in the labour force as a whole. The total growth of just over 1 million trade union members in metals and engineering between 1938 and 1948 accounted for almost a third of the total increase in the number of British trade union members over those years.

The major beneficiary of this expansion in trade unionism in engineering was the Amalgamated Engineering Union, whose membership grew at a slightly faster pace than that of union membership in metals and engineering as a whole, from just under 300,000 in 1938 to 742,000 by 1948, placing it among the giants of the trade union movement, well ahead of the Miners (573,000), whose membership had barely increased since 1938, and of the Railwaymen, whose membership had risen from 364,000 in 1938 to 462,000 in 1948. Even so, the Engineers were still in third place behind the Transport and General Workers (1,271,000) and the General and Municipal Workers (816,000), both of which had experienced substantial growth since 1938. The fastest rate of growth of any considerable union over those years, however, was recorded by the second largest union in the engineering industry, the Electricians, from 58,000 in 1938 to 182,000 in 1948, an increase of 213 per cent compared to the Engineers' 147 per cent.

Among the consequences of these changes in the distribution of trade union membership between industries and trade unions was an increasing influence of the special characteristics of the industrial relations of the engineering industry on the British economy and British society. Another consequence was the increased weight of the three major unions—the two general unions and the Engineers—in the trade union movement, in the Labour Party, and in the economy. One of the outstanding characteristics of industrial relations in engineering was the exceptional influence of union representatives at the place of work—the shop stewards. This influence had not been planned or fostered by trade union leaders, and it was unwelcome to many managers and employers' associations. It was fostered by the plentiful opportunities in the industry for bargaining over pay and conditions of employment in the plant. Conditions of work and techniques of production varied so widely in engineering that national agreements had to be phrased in general terms, leaving much to be settled at the plant; and, although much the

same could be said of the coal industry, there the colliery branch of the union provided a means of negotiation on the spot under firm union control, whereas the employees of a major engineering works might belong to a dozen or more unions, scattered over the town or city in which the works was situated.

The car industry, the most rapidly expanding section of engineering in post-war Britain, provided the most notable examples of shop-floor bargaining, although its conduct varied widely from one plant to another. The outstanding example was provided by the Standard Motor Company's works in Coventry. Before the war trade union organization at Standard had been weak, and the firm had been run autocratically by Sir John Black; but the situation was radically changed when the company switched to aircraft production during the war. Encouraged and guided by the new district secretary of the Transport and General Workers, Jack Jones, who had served with the International Brigade in Spain, experienced trade-unionists secured jobs at Standard and recruited into the union large numbers of the inexperienced workers employed on government orders there. The new jobs involved in fulfilling those orders provided 'very loose prices and some spectacularly flying earnings', associated with rapid increases in production, and by the end of the war 'Black had become sympathetic to working in cooperation with the unions to maximise output and keep control of the works'.<sup>1</sup>

In 1945 he signed an agreement with the district committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions providing for a 42½-hour working week instead of the forty-seven hours then current in the rest of the industry, which was subsequently reduced to forty-four hours a week in November 1946; and for a minimum piece-work bonus of 100 per cent instead of a 27.5 per cent target prescribed by the national agreement. As a consequence, his company was expelled from the Engineering Employers' Federation. A further agreement in 1948 reduced the number of gangs, within which piece-work earnings were shared among the members according to each worker's grade, from over a hundred to nine. Nearly seventy different job grades were also cut, leaving nine, and adult male workers were guaranteed a £5 weekly minimum wage. 'Some of the old gangs had been earning as much as 9s. an hour, and the average for the plant was 6s.½d. The new system produced a much more evenly dispersed average of 6s.1d., compared with a Coventry average of 4s.4d. and the highest rate for a Coventry

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Tolliday, 'High Tide and After: Coventry Engineering Workers and Shopfloor Bargaining 1945-80', in Bill Lancaster and Tony Mason, (eds.), *Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City* (Coventry: Cryfield Press, n.d.) 208-9.



Federated firm of 4s.9d.<sup>2</sup> Stopwatches were banned as a means of assessing piece-work prices, which had to be agreed with the shop stewards of the gang concerned: 'Consultation with stewards was at exceptional levels and while the company was riding on the crest of a wave between 1948 and 1954 there was a very real feeling that the shop stewards ran the company.<sup>3</sup>

A striking contrast to this was provided by Ford at Dagenham. The company's wartime agreement with the Trades Union Congress<sup>4</sup> had committed the company to negotiate with the national officers of the relevant trade unions, but there were no procedures for settling disputed shop-floor issues within the plant or for the recognition of shop stewards. Payment was by time-rates, and the assessment of the workloads that workers were expected to complete on their shifts was a matter for management, and not open to negotiation. Despite these limitations, a shop-steward organization of considerable strength had developed on the shop-floor, and, without any recognized negotiating rights, had turned its attention to fomenting grievances. A consequence of the agreement with Congress was that every union with a claim to representation in the car industry demanded, and secured, a seat on the Ford joint negotiating committee. Almost every car plant had two or more unions on the shop-floor, and some had several, but no other plant had as many as Dagenham.

Relations between management and shop stewards at Rootes in Coventry were in between the extremes of Standard and Ford. The firm's Coventry factories

were 99 per cent unionised. . . . Consultation with stewards was good, with regular Friday night meetings between management and stewards. . . . Management regularly gave in on small issues to keep production going and Rootes were notoriously prone to *ad hoc* settlements which the EEF [Engineering Employers Federation] severely criticised as dangerous precedents. . . . In the early 1950s gangs won the right to elect gang leaders . . . and thereafter gangs exercised tight control over the booking of work and the pace of work to ensure the maintenance of good piecework prices.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of the war Austin in Birmingham had a fair level of union membership, and a vigorous shop stewards' organization, which was not seriously challenged by the managers, although they made attempts to do so. At Pressed Steel in Oxford the situation was much the same, but things were different across the road at Morris Motors. The firm was federated, and had to concede access to the unions during the war; but they were kept at arm's length afterwards, and the managers did all they

<sup>2</sup> Tolliday, 201.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See Ch. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Tolliday, 216.



could to discourage the emergence of a shop stewards' organization. Union membership remained weak until 1956. Vauxhall, at Luton, outside the Engineering Employers' Federation, 'signed a district negotiating agreement with the AEU [Engineers] and NUVB [Vehicle Builders] in 1942, at the same time formalising its existing joint consultative arrangements as an elected Management Advisory Council and announcing a managerial "open door policy" to workers and union representatives'.<sup>6</sup> If this was an attempt to 'kill with kindness', it seems to have succeeded. For many years thereafter union membership and activity within Vauxhall remained at a modest level. In the post-war years, therefore, the British car industry presented a wide variety of approaches from one firm to another towards shop-steward organization and work-place bargaining, but in all the major firms, except Morris Motors and Vauxhall, shop-steward organization and work-place bargaining had developed far beyond the pre-war situation.

The Engineering and Allied Shop Steward Movement continued into the post-war years. It still published a monthly journal, although its catchy title of *New Propeller* had been changed to the alien-sounding *Metal Worker*, but both the paper and the organization had lost the enthusiasm and confidence that had sustained them before the war when they were campaigning for a separate aircraft agreement under the title of the Aircraft Shop Stewards' national committee, and co-ordinating factory collections on behalf of strikers in aircraft factories; and into the war years when their efforts were directed to increasing the output of munitions and the setting-up of joint production committees. After the war they tried to find new issues in campaigns for national pay increases and for a shorter working week, and in proposals for a revision of the engineering procedure agreement, but these did not evoke the same enthusiasm. Writing more than thirty years after the war, the historian of the shop stewards' movement of 1935-45, Richard Croucher, compared it with 'current factory trade unionism'. The former, he wrote, was

a shop stewards' *movement*. There is no real equivalent to that movement today. That shop stewards' movement had a large-circulation newspaper which, in its early days at least, played a vital part in building up trade unionism. . . . Second, local factory papers were also more common than they are today. Through these papers the shop stewards carried on a dialogue with their members which ensured that they remained closely in touch. The whole culture of workplace meetings was more deeply rooted; regular meetings helped to ensure that all workers were drawn into the discussion of their working lives, and that this was not something left to the shop steward.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> H. A. Turner, Garfield Clack, and Geoffrey Roberts, *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), 194.

<sup>7</sup> Croucher, 377.

If this is intended to imply that work-place meetings in engineering factories were discontinued after the war, and that engineering workers were no longer drawn into discussion of their working lives, but left such matters entirely to their shop stewards and unions, it is far from correct so far as the car industry is concerned, and also in relation to many other engineering plants. The decline in the national shop stewards' movement was due not so much to apathy in individual engineering plants, but to lack of a common interest binding work-place organizations together. The focus of interest for workers and shop stewards in car and other engineering plants had shifted from the great issues of pre-war and wartime to their domestic negotiations.

This post-war decentralization of trade-unionism and industrial relations—for it was not the unions alone that were affected; there was also a marked decline in the discipline of employers' organizations, especially of the Engineering Employers' Federation—was not unprecedented. Something of the kind had also occurred during the First World War, and during the brief post-war boom of 1919-20, but it was quickly brought under control by the disciplines of unemployment and bankruptcy in the depression of 1921; and those disciplines had continued to exert their influence for the rest of the inter-war period, albeit with some relaxation after 1934. One measure of decentralization in industrial relations was the number of stoppages, which peaked in Britain at 1,607 in 1920 and did not pass 1,000 again until 1937. From 1941 onwards that figure was exceeded every year, and in 1944, 1945, and 1946 the total was above 2,000.

Full employment brought decentralisation in industrial relations in other countries besides Britain, but the centrifugal tendencies at work in Britain were more powerful than those in most, if not all, other industrial countries. The most important centrifugal pressures in Britain were complicated pay structures and multi-unionism. Few metalworking plants overseas can have had pay structures as complicated as those common in large British engineering plants. As for multi-unionism, some European countries had Communist, Socialist, and Catholic trade unions, with perhaps one or two splinter groups; the United States had the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Railway Brotherhoods, and several independent unions; but anything like the union structure in the British engineering industry, with more than thirty unions recognized by the employers as accredited representatives of their employees, many of them recruiting members in competition with one, two, three, or even more unions in the same plant, was hardly found, if at all, in any other country.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. H. A. Clegg, *Trade Unionism under Collective Bargaining* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 31-9.

Moreover the problem of competition with other unions for members in the plant was not the major difficulty for the unions concerned. The main difficulty was for the union officials outside the plant, at district or regional level, let alone national headquarters, to exercise effective control over their members in the plant. Many of these officials kept in close touch with their shop stewards, and especially with their conveners and senior stewards, so that they were well informed about what went on in the plant, at least to the extent that the conveners and senior stewards were ready to disclose it to them. Exceptional union officers, such as Jack Jones at Coventry, where his was the dominant union, could exert a powerful influence over plant negotiations by acting as wise and skilful consultants to shop stewards' committees, but the agreements that he and his fellow local officials from the other engineering unions signed had to suit the circumstances and wishes of the stewards in the plants and the workers they represented—or they would not last. Otherwise they might be, and often were, so modified in practice, and by arrangement between foremen and departmental managers and shop stewards in the departments in the plants, or even with individuals and small groups of workers, as to work on the shop-floor in a very different manner from what the original negotiators had intended.

Other reasons were put forward to explain this decentralization of union power. Many managers held that it was the consequence of defective control by the trade union hierarchy outside the plant. The unions, they said, had too few full-time officers to exercise effective control over their members in the plants; trade union officers were overworked and underpaid; there were too few candidates of sufficient calibre for vacant posts; the domestic lives of union officers were disrupted by excessive hours of work; unions were losing competent officers to posts in the nationalized industries and elsewhere.

In the immediate post-war years there was little hard evidence against which to assess the force of these complaints, but in 1961 a study was published which assembled evidence by which these and similar complaints against the unions could be tested.<sup>9</sup> Information was supplied by seventeen major unions, whose total membership was well over half of all British trade union members. Much of the data collected went back to 1945 and even earlier. It was used to estimate the total number of full-time trade union officers in Britain, and from this figure the number of trade union members per officer was calculated. This figure fell slightly between 1939 and 1951, from 3,996 to 3,643,<sup>10</sup> but the difference is not significant. The control

<sup>9</sup> H. A. Clegg, A. J. Killick, and Rex Adams, *Trade Union Officers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 38.

of trade union members by their unions had not been made more difficult by a relative decline in the number of trade union officers since before the war.

Other findings were that officers' salaries had risen less than wage rates and average earnings since 1938, but had 'probably kept pace with other salaries', and there was 'still a margin between the starting-point of the officers' salary scales and average earnings in the industries in which each union organises'.<sup>11</sup> The evidence did 'not show that the time spent at work causes a major domestic problem for trade union officers'.<sup>12</sup> Most officers spent, 'on average, three evenings a week and one or two weekends a month on union business'.<sup>13</sup> The experience of the two unions with systematic recruitment schemes was that 'properly qualified candidates for full-time office considerably exceed the posts available'.<sup>14</sup> Average turnover had risen from 5.0 per cent in 1933-8 to 6.4 per cent in 1945-50,<sup>15</sup> but this was probably a consequence of a wider range of opportunities for posts outside the unions available to trade union officers in the immediate post-war years, especially in the nationalized industries. Full-time officers were supported by office staffs numbering 'probably between 4,000 and 4,500', and by 'about 400 full-time branch secretaries', who, for one reason or another, were not graded as full-time trade union officers.<sup>16</sup> In addition a very considerable but incalculable number of employees in both public and private industry were allowed by their employers to take time off from their normal duties to undertake trade union work. This evidence does not substantiate the view that the primary cause of decentralization in the unions was a shortage of trade union officers, or a decline in the standard of union officers or in their conditions of employment.

It is, of course, possible that some of the full-time trade union officers who had been able to manage their unions effectively in the pre-war years were unable to do so in post-war conditions even though their number had kept pace with rising membership, and there is no substantial evidence that their quality had declined. It is also possible that an increased number of officers of higher calibre would have been able to do the job more effectively. In order to determine the truth of this hypothesis, it may be sufficient to review the experience of the three largest unions, the Engineers and the two general unions, since between them they accounted for not far short of 40 per cent of total British trade union membership.

The first consideration is the membership over which the full-time union officers were expected to exercise control. The industrial

<sup>11</sup> Clegg, Killick, and Adams, 90.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 84-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 102-3.



distribution of the membership differed markedly between the three unions. The Engineers organized predominantly in the engineering industry. They no longer confined themselves to skilled craftsmen, but recruited all grades of worker, both male and female. Skilled craftsmen, however, still had their own section within the union, and provided the overwhelming majority, if not all, of the full-time officers and national committeemen.<sup>17</sup> Outside engineering the union had members in almost every industry in the country, for there were few industries, if any, that did not employ engineering craftsmen on maintenance work; and in some instances craftsmen's mates working with these skilled men may have held cards in the union. However, the great majority of the union's members worked in the engineering industry, broadly defined. Both the general unions organized in the same wide range of industries: engineering; construction; road transport; national-government services; local-authority services; gas, electricity and water supply; docks; chemicals; quarries; food, drink, and tobacco; textiles; and many others. However, generally speaking, one of them predominated by a wide margin in most industries in which both of them recruited members. The Transport and General Workers had the most members in road transport, docks, vehicle manufacture, and construction. The General and Municipal Workers outweighed the Transport and General Workers in local-government services, hospitals, gas and electricity supply, heavy engineering, and shipbuilding. This difference in the distribution of membership profoundly affected their characteristics and the tasks facing the officers of the unions. The docks and vehicle manufacture were two of the country's most strike-prone industries, and road transport had a fair record of strikes, whereas local-government services, hospitals, and gas and electricity supply were relatively strike-free.

Most branches of the engineering industry were well above the national average for the incidence of strikes, both in terms of number of stoppages and number of days off work. Accordingly striking was a more common experience for the Engineers, by far the largest union in the industry, than for most other trade unions. On the other hand, their engineering membership was not concentrated in vehicle manufacture to the same extent as the Engineering Trade Group of the Transport and General Workers, so the incidence of strikes among Engineers in that branch of engineering was higher than that among the Engineers generally.

However, the behaviour of the three unions was by no means entirely determined by the industries in which their members were to be found.

<sup>17</sup> The national committee was the union's delegate conference.

Their methods of government and organization, their traditions, and their approach to trade-unionism also had an influence on their behaviour. The simplest structure of the three was that of the Engineers. It was almost entirely geographical. The members were grouped into branches, with branch officers. The branches were grouped into districts, with district committees and district secretaries whose posts were usually full-time in districts with a substantial membership. The districts were grouped into twenty-six divisions which elected their divisional officers and committees. The governing body, the executive council of seven members, was elected by the members whose districts were grouped into seven electoral divisions for the purpose; along with a president and general secretary elected by the members at large. Although the members of a given branch, or even a given district, might all be drawn from a given industry, the only recognized concession to organization by industry was the practice by which the executive councilmen shared among themselves the responsibility for national negotiations in the many industries in which the union was recognized by the employers, and the practice by which there was a similar distribution of duties among the national officers, who were elected in the same electoral divisions as the councilmen.

Organization by industry was given at least equal weight to territorial organization by the Transport and General Workers. There were 'general' branches in places where members in particular industries were not sufficiently numerous to support separate branches, but the biennial delegate conference was elected by ballot of the members voting in trade groups. The executive council consisted of one member chosen by each of the national trade group committees which were elected by ballot of the members of those groups, along with representatives elected by the regional committees, which were elected by the members in the region. Apart from the general secretary, who was elected by a ballot of all the members, the full-time officers were all appointed by the appropriate regional or trade group committee, or by the executive. The affairs of particular industries were handled by the area and national trade group committees, except where an issue was considered of sufficient importance to come before the executive itself.

Within the General and Municipal Workers, organization by industry unquestionably took second place to geographical organization. Whether or not their membership was drawn from a single industry, each branch had no relationship with the national government of the union except through the region in which it was situated. The members of the regional committees were elected by the branches, as were the delegates to the biennial conference, who attended as regional delegations led by their regional secretaries. These regional secretaries

were all members of the general council, along with a 'lay' member chosen from each regional committee, and four additional members from the four largest districts. However, the full general council was normally restricted to four meetings a year. At other times business was conducted by an executive committee consisting of five of the regional secretaries chosen by the council along with one 'lay' member of the General council from each of the five remaining regions. A number of national industrial officers were appointed to handle the affairs of individual industries for the union as a whole. Similar responsibilities within the regions were given to the regional officers; but the regional officers were responsible only to their regional committees and secretaries, although they naturally consulted and kept in touch with the national officer responsible for any industry whose business they were handling. Regional officers were originally selected from the available candidates by their regional committees. Thereafter they served as 'appointed officers' for two years. At the end of that period an election was held in which any member of the region with the requisite period of membership could seek nomination by his branch. Perhaps not surprisingly, no appointed officer failed to win the election, after which he became an 'elected officer'. Despite the certainty of the outcome, opposing candidates continued to come forward. Perhaps they considered that they were drawing the attention of the regional committee and secretary to their availability for the next appointment. Moreover, the elected officers appear to have attached some value to their new status. The understanding was that once that status had been achieved the officer concerned could be appointed to any senior post in the union, except that of general secretary, by the appropriate regional committee, or by the national executive, as the case might be. When the general secretary retired, a ballot of the whole union was held to choose his successor.

The Engineers chose their full-time officers by ballot in the district, the region, or nationally, according to the responsibilities of the post, and every officer had to submit to a further vote every three years at which any qualified member of the union could stand against him.

There were also substantial differences between the three unions in the structure of their legislative and policy-making body. The delegate conference of the Transport and General Workers met every second year. Its members were elected by the members of the union voting in their area trade groups to the number of one delegate to 1,000 members, making it a large assembly of well over 1,000. By contrast the Engineers' national committee, as it was called, consisted of two delegates from each of the twenty-six divisions—a mere fifty-two members in all. Between them came the General and Municipal Workers with delegates



elected by the districts to the number of one delegate to approximately 2,000 members, making a total of about 400 elected delegates. In addition to the general secretary and the chairman, all members of the general council (including the regional secretaries), and one-third of the district officers in rotation, attended conference: the chairman of the union, elected by conference to preside over its sittings, was generally a regional secretary, but for one period of several years it was a regional officer, Fred Marshall. The chairman of the Transport and General Workers' conference was a lay member, but the Engineers' national committee was chaired by the president of the union, who took precedence over the general secretary. The latter's function was generally regarded as primarily an administrative job.

How did the differences in structure affect the functioning of the three unions? One outstanding contrast was the position of the chief officer. The president of the Engineers and the general secretary of the General and Municipal Workers held posts of great authority, but they were no more than the principal members of their unions' teams of full-time officers. The post of general secretary of the Transport and General Workers, by contrast, was placed on a substantially higher plane. Not only was the incumbent the leader of the biggest union in the country. His authority over that union was enhanced by the wide gap between his post and those of his colleagues in the other two unions. He controlled access to the executive council, none of whose members enjoyed the status and authority of the members of the executive bodies of the Engineers, who were all full-time officers, and of the General and Municipal Workers, half of whom were full-time officers, holding the senior posts in the hierarchy of the union after the general secretary. It may be said that some 'lay' members of the Transport and General Workers' executive council carried considerable weight in the union through force of personality. Bert Papworth could serve as an example. However, it was also true that Ernest Bevin was the outstanding British trade union leader of all time; and that Arthur Deakin, at least after Bevin finally retired and allowed him to be confirmed as general secretary in a ballot, was the outstanding union leader of his day. The above argument is concerned with the status and authority of posts, and not with personalities.

Another contrast between the Transport and General Workers and the two other unions is in the position of full-time officers other than the general secretary in the government of their unions. In the Engineers and the General and Municipal Workers these officers had a recognized position in the government of their unions. The Engineers' executive council consisted of full-time officers, and half the members of the General and Municipal Workers' executive committee, other than the



general secretary, were regional secretaries. In both unions, therefore, full-time officers were in a position to take part in the executive's decisions. Moreover, in the General and Municipal Workers, district officers were entitled to attend conference every third year in rotation, and the regional secretaries acted as the leaders of their regional delegations. Other regional officers, however, were entitled to speak on matters within their competence, but the understanding was that they did not move resolutions or amendments. These provisions gave the full-time officers of the two unions a share in the making of the policy and rules of their unions far beyond that enjoyed by the officers of the Transport and General Workers.

Some of the differences between the three unions can be illustrated by their handling of the growth of Communist influence within the unions during and after the war, when the decentralization of industrial relations was exploited by the Communist Party. The party had reached its peak of membership in 1945 when two Communists were returned to Parliament, but the impetus that they had developed in the trade unions during the war continued to carry them forward there for two or three more years. During the late thirties and the war the number of Communists elected to the Engineers' national committee and to their delegations to the Trades Union Congress had been rising year by year, and they had begun to win elections for full-time officers' posts. Joe Scott had been elected national organizer in 1935; in 1942 he was elected to one of the seven seats on the executive council. In the same year the number of national organizers' posts was increased from one to three, and Walter Hannington was elected to one of them. In 1944 the union created four regional officers' posts, three of which were won by Communists. In 1945 George Crane and Les Ambrose joined Hannington as national organizers, and Gilbert Hitchings joined Scott on the executive council, where, with the support of two left-wing Labour members, they were able to pass a number of resolutions of their choice, but not if the outcome depended on the casting vote of the president, Jack Tanner. A syndicalist in the First World war, when he had supported the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Tanner had been regarded as a man of the Left when he was first elected president in 1938, but by the end of the war his views had come into line with those of the majority of his colleagues on the General Council of Congress, to which he had been elected in 1943.<sup>18</sup>

Following the London bus strike of 1937, Bert Papworth and Bill Jones had been expelled from the Transport and General Workers' Union.<sup>19</sup> They were readmitted the following year, but debarred from

<sup>18</sup> Information provided by Nina Fishman.

<sup>19</sup> See Ch. 1.

holding office for four years. At the end of that period they were both re-elected to the Central Bus Committee in London, and Papworth was re-elected to the union's executive council, where he was subsequently joined by Jones. It had been decided before the war that one of the union's customary two representatives on the General Council of Congress should be a 'lay' member of the union. In 1944 Papworth was nominated for this position, and as the only other nominees for the three places allotted to the relevant group of unions (Transport other than Railways) were Deakin and Charles Jarman of the Seamen, Papworth was declared elected, and became one of the very few 'lay' trade union members ever to serve on the General Council, and its first Communist.

In 1946, there were nine members of the Communist Party among the thirty-four members of the Transport and General Workers' executive. The following year Deakin decided that they should be removed. According to V. L. Allen, in his study of Deakin,<sup>20</sup> there were 'four main reasons' for his opposition to the Communists in his union: '(1) They endeavoured to use the Union for their own particular ends; (2) in doing this they employed methods which conflicted with the established practices and agreed policy of the Union; (3) their primary allegiance was to the Communist Party and not to the Union; and (4) he was personally antagonised by Communists on his Executive.'<sup>21</sup> Allen's only example of the second point is that Communists promoted unofficial strikes. It might be claimed that unofficial strikes were a common feature of many British unions, including several sections of the Transport and General Workers, and that they were promoted by many other trade union activists besides the Communists. However, a more important comment is that all four points, except perhaps the last, had been as true before the war and during the war, when (apart from the London bus strike of 1937) Bevin and Deakin had apparently been able to work with Communists without too much difficulty. Deakin almost certainly decided to move against the Communists in his union because of the cold war. In 1947 the alliance between the Western powers and the Soviet Union fell apart, and British Communists were called on to argue the Soviet case, and to take what action they could to weaken the Western alliance.

On 27 October 1948 the General Council of Congress considered a letter from Deakin complaining of interference by the Communist Party in the affairs of trades councils and trade unions which it referred to its Finance and General Purposes Committee. Tewson, however, did not consider that the Council 'should remain silent on the question for another four weeks' (until their next meeting), so he had prepared a

<sup>20</sup> *Trade Union Leadership* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), 273.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 274-9.

statement which he read to the meeting. After 'minor amendments', the statement, entitled 'Trade Unionism and Communism', read:

The Communist Parties, under the direction of the Cominform, have been specifically ordered to oppose the Marshall Plan. Statements made officially by spokesmen of the Communist Party in Britain prove beyond question that sabotage of the European Recovery Programme is its present aim. Communist influences are everywhere at work to frame industrial demands for purposes of political agitation; to magnify industrial grievances; and to bring about stoppages . . .

The General Council are convinced that the great body of trade unionists and the responsible Executives of all affiliated organisations will give the instigators of this campaign of sabotage short-shrift when it is realised that they are acting as the abject and slavish agents of forces working incessantly to intensify social misery and to create conditions of chaos and economic instability in which the trade unions will find it impossible to pursue their essential task of protecting and advancing the best interests of workpeople the world over.<sup>22</sup>

Papworth opposed the statement 'in its entirety', but it was carried by 24 votes to 2.

On 24 November the General Council met to consider the findings of its Finance and General Purposes Committee on Deakin's complaint. The report said that it was 'a matter for the Unions whether' it was 'consistent with the obligation of loyalty to the Union and to the Movement as a whole' for members to serve on the national committees and subcommittees of the Communist Party 'whilst holding executive or delegated office in the Union'. It proposed that the General Council 'take all possible steps to repudiate' trade union representatives who 'create misunderstanding of the British Trade Union Movement' overseas. The report was carried by 23 votes to 2, and issued to the unions under the title 'Defend Democracy'. The opposing votes were cast by Papworth, A. W. Burrows of the Distributive and Allied Workers (who served for only two years on the General Council), J. B. Figgins of the Railwaymen, and Ted Hill of the Boilermakers. The last two held long-established reputations as men of the Left, although both of them were far too individualistic in their opinions to be accurately described as 'fellow-travellers' of the Communist Party.

'Defend Democracy' was discussed on the first day of the meeting of the biennial conference of the Transport and General Workers' Union on 11 July 1949, and was approved by 508 votes to 123. The proposal to ban Communists from office in the union 'either as a lay member or as a permanent or full-time officer' aroused more opposition, but it too was carried, by 426 votes to 208. By this time the number of Communists on

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1949), 274-5.



the executive council had been reduced from nine to eight.<sup>23</sup> Various attempts were made to persuade the executive to suspend the operation of the new rule, without success, and the nine full-time officers who had been dismissed for refusing to sign the declaration which was now required of them for lodged appeals, which were rejected.

The General and Municipal Workers had already experienced trouble with the Communists in 1927 when several London branches were suspended and a number of 'lay' officers in the region disqualified for association with the Communist-inspired Minority Movement. The union had then applied the remedy adopted twenty years later by the Transport and General Workers. Their general council decided that a member of the Communist Party or the Minority Movement could not hold office in the union. The rule was not always strictly applied at branch and shop-steward level in all the regions, but thereafter no known Communist secured a full-time post or was elected to one of the regional or national councils or committees.

Towards the end of the war there was recrudescence of left-wing activity in London, in which the regional chairman, J. Leslie, and V. Fox, one of the two 'lay' members of the region on the General Council, were particularly prominent. It is impossible to say whether they or any of their associates were members of the Communist Party, for even if they had been, the ban on Communists in the union would have deterred them from admitting it. The Communist Party was well accustomed to recruiting 'secret' members in such circumstances. In the first instance their influence became apparent only through left-wing resolutions passed by the regional committee and council, but shortly after the war a series of strikes in London gave evidence of an intention to pursue left-wing aims by more damaging methods. The first evidence of this intention came in a series of unofficial strikes led by shop stewards in the electricity-supply industry in the London area in 1946. These strikes did not cause great alarm in the union, which was only one of several unions involved. The workers' side of the industry's negotiating body suggested to the unions that they should take appropriate action, and the General and Municipal Workers' executive committee instructed the London and Southern regions to do so.

The next dispute was a more serious matter. It was in fact two successive unofficial strikes in the autumn of 1946 at the London

<sup>23</sup> The proportional strength of the Communists was further diminished by an increase in the number of seats on the executive from thirty-four to thirty-eight. Twenty-seven of these were elected by ballot of the members in the region and eleven were chosen by their colleagues in the eleven trade group committees, showing that the Communists, with four trade group representatives and four regional representatives, were more successful in committees than with the members.



Cossor factory where the great majority of workers belonged to the union. Both arose over allegations of victimization of shop stewards by the management. The first was called off to allow negotiations to take place. They failed, and the second was supported by only a minority of the workers. It dragged on through the autumn until the union agreed to terms of settlement at the end of November, and set up a committee to inquire into the strikes. The report, issued in May 1947, found the strike due to 'wanton, if not deliberate, misuse of facilities granted to shop stewards', and conduct by the branch secretary 'contrary to the rules and policy of the union'.<sup>24</sup> The conduct of the London district committee in relation to the strike was also censured. The inquiry went on to make recommendations about shop stewards which led to the preparation of a shop stewards' handbook by the union's research department, followed by new rules on shop stewards agreed by the union's conference in 1950.

Several other regions believed that London's shortcomings had not been censured with sufficient severity, but before anything could be done, an even more damaging series of strikes began in the London catering trade. The unions concerned with the industry had allotted responsibility for recruitment and negotiations in London to the General and Municipal Workers. The officer given the job, Arthur Lewis, one of the new Labour Members of Parliament who had won seats in the great Labour victory in 1945, made a sensational success by sweeping 13,000 hotel employees into the union; but the London hoteliers refused to recognize the union. In October 1946 an unofficial strike began at the Savoy and spread to other hotels. The union did not condemn the strike, although it was unofficial, because it was not in breach of a negotiated agreement. However, by October the principle of recognition had been agreed, and the strike was called off. An agreement was finally signed in March 1947.

Further trouble arose when the Savoy suspended a prominent member of the union named Piazza. The union appealed to the National Arbitration Tribunal which awarded in the union's favour on 30 July 1947, but the hotel still refused to reinstate Piazza, who was finally dismissed a few days later. After appeals to the Ministry of Labour for assistance had brought no comfort, the union decided to call an official strike for Piazza's reinstatement in November. Belatedly the minister set up a court of inquiry into the dispute. The Savoy notified its employees, many of whom had already begun an unofficial strike, that they would be dismissed if they did not return to work, and the official strike began. The court, chaired by Sir John Forster, found the ground cut from

<sup>24</sup> Clegg, *General Union*, 123.

under its feet when, on 10 November, the High Court delivered judgment in the case of *Rex v. National Arbitration Tribunal* that the National Arbitration Tribunal had no power to direct the reinstatement of a workman in any circumstances. After this there was not much the court of inquiry could do except criticize the conduct of both sides to the dispute and recommend that they negotiate a settlement and join in finding another job for Piazza. Meanwhile the strike continued, and the conduct of the pickets became more disorderly. Arrests were made, and among those arrested was Arthur Lewis.

The union and the Savoy accepted the court's advice. At the beginning of December they agreed that there should be no victimization, that the strikers should be reinstated as soon as possible, and that joint action should be taken to help Piazza. The union executive also relieved Lewis of his responsibility for the catering industry. The London district committee responded by asserting its full confidence in him, and expressed its 'profound disgust'<sup>25</sup> at the terms of settlement. The executive suspended the committee and instructed the regional secretary to act under the direction of the general secretary. In the end Leslie, Fox, and another member of the London regional committee were banned from any office in the union until the executive should determine otherwise. The suspension of the remainder of the committee was to be reviewed at the end of six months. Arthur Lewis was dismissed and later expelled from the union. The London regional secretary was superannuated, and the Southern regional secretary, Jack Cooper, was transferred to London to take temporary control until a new regional secretary should be chosen.

The union rules gave the executive and the general council ample scope to deal with the events of the years 1946-7, and with those responsible for them; but they were slow to act. Two reasons may be advanced for this. The first is that the Left had taken fairly comprehensive control of the London region by this time, and in a union as devoted to regional autonomy as the General and Municipal Workers the national leaders were naturally cautious about intervening decisively in the affairs of one of the largest regions. The second reason is the change in the leadership of the union. Charles Dukes retired in 1946, when Tom Williamson, one of the national officers of the union, was elected to take his place as general secretary. Dukes was a decisive leader, but his method was to prepare the ground carefully before intervening, to make sure of success. He was no doubt aware of developments in the London region, but he may have decided that matters were not ripe for intervention in 1946, especially by a general

<sup>25</sup> Clegg, 128.

secretary who had only a few months of office remaining. Tom Williamson, by contrast, was not as self-confident as Dukes had been, and took some time to make up his mind how to deal with the difficult situation.

Something of the differences in the characters of these three great unions can be discerned from their experience of dealing with the challenge from the Left during the immediate post-war years. The Engineers were by far the most homogeneous of the three. The engineering industry is a sprawling and varied industry with many sections, but the Engineers' union was far less heterogeneous than either of the general unions. Moreover, almost all if not all of its full-time officers, shared the common background of an engineering apprenticeship. Most, if not all, had been shop stewards. Besides this common ethos, they worked together much more closely than the Transport and General Workers' full-time officers, who were spread over a wide range of diverse industries; and all of them had been elected by the members who, if they chose, could get rid of them at the next election. Those of the union's leaders who were opposed to communism may have contemplated the possibility of a change in the union rules to bar Communists from office as they watched the continued success of Communist candidates in elections to the national committee and to full-time posts during the war and over the following two or three years, but they would have gone on to realize the impossibility of winning a majority in a ballot or in the national committee for such a proposal. There was no one among them with Deakin's towering authority to push such a measure through the union; and even someone like Deakin would probably have failed to do so.

The Transport and General Workers' Union was, by contrast, the most heterogeneous union in the country. It was bound together by its constitution, and by the national institutions created by its constitution: the biennial delegate conference, the executive council, and the general secretary. In particular, immense power rested with the general secretary by virtue of his office, as well as by the exceptional force of character of both Bevin and Deakin. When Deakin decided that the union must shift from tolerance of Communists to repression, the change was made, despite the cost in the loss of experienced and talented full-time and 'lay' officers.

Although the spread of its membership across industries was nearly as diverse as that of the Transport and General Workers, the General and Municipal Workers' Union was clearly the more homogeneous of the two unions. This was the consequence of a greater emphasis on regional and local units of organization at the expense of industrial organization. This emphasis could be seen in the pride that the active members of the

union, and especially the full-time officers, developed in their region. Their industrial responsibilities took second place to their regional loyalties. They were quick to reject Communist influence as an alien intrusion in the union, but when a whole region appeared to have swung to support of left-wing policies, they and the members of the committees with whom they worked were at first reluctant to override the principle of regional autonomy.

Communist influence was strong in other unions besides the Engineers and the Transport and General Workers. The hold of the party in the South Wales and Scottish areas of the Mineworkers has already been noted.<sup>26</sup> They had substantial support also in other areas, especially in Derbyshire. In 1946 Arthur Horner was elected secretary of the national union, but it did not follow that the union had fallen under Communist control. In the following year the president, Will Lawther, repudiated a speech made by Horner as fraternal delegate to the Communist-controlled miners' union in France, and a sub-committee of the union's executive 'issued a report condemning Horner, without having invited him to meet them'.<sup>27</sup> Even the South Wales Miners failed to support Horner on this occasion, but that did not indicate that they had turned against Communists. In 1951 Will Paynter, who had already followed Horner in a succession of posts in South Wales, and was later to succeed him as secretary of the national union, was elected president of the South Wales Miners.

Two other unions whose general secretaries were Communists were the Fire Brigades Union with John Horner and the Foundry Workers with Jim Gardner; but the union in which Communist influence had penetrated furthest was the Electrical Trades Union. When the first full-time president of the union, H. P. Bolton, retired in 1946, a Communist, Frank Foulkes, with a reputation as an outstanding negotiator, was elected to take his place. Another Communist, Gus Cole, was elected to take Foulkes's previous post as national organizer. In 1948 the general secretary, E. W. Bussey, retired, and the personable and popular Walter Stevens, another Communist, who had been elected assistant general secretary in 1942, was chosen in his place. Stevens' former post was filled by still another Communist, Frank Haxell, who was to show himself a determined and relentless manipulator. By this time the union could reasonably be described as 'Communist-dominated'.

In October 1942 the union's executive council had decided, by 5 votes to 4, to call a rules-revision conference 'for the purpose of dealing with the interference of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the internal

<sup>26</sup> See pp. 158-63.

<sup>27</sup> Paynter, 124.



affairs of the Electrical Trades Union, and to deal with a proposal from the Executive Council that members of the Communist Party be debarred from holding any office or acting as a delegate on behalf of the Union'. Under the rules a decision of the executive to call a rules-revision conference would have been valid only if it had been unanimous. Accordingly the proposal was put to a ballot of the members, who voted by almost two to one in favour of such a conference. When the delegates met, Bussey delivered a powerful attack on Communist intrigue in the union which, he said, was 'destroying the whole basis of mutual trust and confidence between the membership'. He gave detailed instances of their electioneering techniques and intrigues. By a vote of 31 to 19 the conference agreed the charge of illicit interference by the Communists had been established. Bussey next proposed that Communists be banned from holding office in the union. In this he had clearly overplayed his hand. He was told that the existing provisions of the rules could cope with the problem, that there were other disrupters besides the Communists, and that there was a problem in identifying Communists. There was scarcely any support for the proposal, and Bussey withdrew it.<sup>28</sup> Evidently the anti-Communist majority on the executive had failed to organize effective support in the branches. The conference was probably the last opportunity to reverse the Communist take-over of the union, which was confirmed after the war when the Communists won a majority on the executive council.

This discussion of union organization and government began with the question of whether full-time officers found it more difficult to control their members in the conditions of post-war Britain than they had done before the war. No clear answer has emerged. One possible measure of control is the number of strikes—not the size of strikes, for a large official strike, in which a large number of workers stay out for a considerable period of time, is an indication of strong union discipline rather than loss of control. By contrast, but strikes in which relatively few workers come out for a few days are for the most part unofficial—called without due notice to the employers, and unconstitutional—called without the authorization of the union or unions concerned.

Table 3 shows that the number of strikes in Britain rose sharply during the war, peaking at an unprecedentedly high figure in 1945, and then began to fall through the post-war years. The inference is that union discipline was weakened in the conditions of wartime production, but began to recover during the post-war years, although it did not revert to pre-war strength. It is easy to believe that both industrial and trade union discipline would be weakened in wartime with a labour force

<sup>28</sup> John Lloyd, *Light and Liberty* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990), 282–6.

TABLE 3. *General indicators*

Year	Total union membership (000s)	Union density (%)	No of stoppages (000s)	Working days lost through stoppages	Cost-of-living/retail price index (June)	Basic weekly wage rates	Average earnings	Unemployed insured workers
1933	4,350	22.9	357	1,072	136	34.5		19.9
1934	4,539	23.8	471	959	138	34.6		16.7
1935	4,803	25.1	553	1,955	140	35.2		15.5
1936	5,225	27.2	818	1,829	144	36.2		13.1
1937	5,757	29.9	1,129	3,413	152	37.6		10.8
1938	5,969	30.8	875	1,334	155	38.1	69.0 (Oct)	12.9
1939	6,206	31.9	940	1,356	153	39.8		10.5
1940	6,519	33.4	922	940	181	44.4	89.0 (Jly)	6.0
1941	7,048	36.0	1,251	1,079	200	48.3	99.5 (Jly)	2.2
1942	7,722	39.3	1,303	1,527	199	51.2	111.5 (Jly)	0.8
1943	8,031	40.7	1,785	1,808	198	53.6	121.3 (Jly)	0.5
1944	7,936	40.0	2,194	3,714	200	55.9	124.4 (Jly)	0.5
1945	7,684	38.6	2,293	2,835	203	58.7	121.4 (Jly)	1.3
1946	8,603	43.0	2,205	2,158	203	63.6	120.9 (Oct)	2.5

1947	8,931	44.5	1,721	2,433	100	66.3	128.1 (Oct)	3.1
1948	9,118	45.0	1,759	1,944	100.7	68.8	137.11 (Oct)	1.7
1949	9,077	44.7	1,426	1,807	111.1	70.0	142.8 (Oct)	1.6
1950	9,021	43.8	1,339	1,389	113.6	72.9	150.5 (Oct)	1.6
1951	9,266	46.7	1,719	1,694	124.5	80.9	166.0 (Oct)	1.6

Notes: Figures for trade union membership and density are taken from Bain and Price, table 2.2. Union-density figures for individual industries are available only for Great Britain. For the sake of consistency, therefore, figures of trade union membership in this table, and throughout the volume, are given for Great Britain and not for the United Kingdom. Over this period the figures of total trade union membership for Great Britain and the United Kingdom were rarely more than 1 per cent apart.

All the remaining figures are taken from the Department of Employment and Productivity, *British Labour Statistics* (stoppages: table 197; cost-of-living and retail price index: tables 89, 90; basic weekly wage rates: table 13; average earnings: tables 40, 41; percentage unemployed: tables 160, 161, 169). All of them relate to the United Kingdom.

The main effect of the decline in unemployment on union funds from 1934 onwards was to swell the surplus retained by the unions.

depleted of many of its workers and supplemented by large numbers of workers, many of them women, who were unaccustomed to industrial work. Moreover they were working more hours a week than has been usual before the war, and were further harried by air raids. It might have been supposed that discipline should recover after the war as men and women demobilized from the services returned to their normal jobs. It is, however, to be noted that the annual number of strikes did not fall to the average figure of the thirties, or even near it, indicating a lasting decline in industrial and trade union discipline above all due to full employment.

Another post-war change in the power of trade unions was in their political influence. It may seem paradoxical to assert that the political influence of the trade unions declined in the post-war years, despite the increase in union membership and the replacement of the wartime coalition by a Labour government; but it was so. This decline was not in relation to their influence with pre-war Conservative governments, although Chamberlain paid a good deal of attention to the unions;<sup>29</sup> it was in relation to the wartime coalition under Churchill. The change was in part due to changes in trade union leadership. Early in 1946 Citrine was offered an appointment as a full-time member of the National Coal Board which was to take control of the coal industry at the beginning of 1947. He told the General Council on 19 February 1946 that he did not want 'to sever entirely his connection with Congress', and he wanted 'safeguards in the event of the work of the Board terminating'. It was unanimous in offering him leave of absence with assured superannuation rights and, if his services at the Coal Board were terminated, 'a position equal to the one he vacated'. He asked whether these terms meant that 'at the moment he took employment at the N.C.B. he would cease being general secretary of the T.U.C.'. When his colleagues confirmed that was correct, he replied that he would not accept the offer, 'as he was not prepared to sacrifice his position at the T.U.C.'.

Shinwell, the Minister of Fuel and Power, came to the next meeting of the Council, on 25 February, to say that both Attlee and he were 'very anxious to secure Citrine for the Coal Board' and it was agreed that Citrine should join the board on the terms that he had rejected the week before. What persuaded him to change his mind? His autobiography gives no explanation, but his actions would be explicable if Shinwell had assured him that, provided he joined the Coal Board, he could rely on being appointed chairman of the British Electricity Authority when electricity was nationalized—as, in fact, he was. At Congress in

<sup>29</sup> See Ch. 2.



September Tewson was the only candidate for Citrine's post. Tewson was not of his predecessor's calibre. Citrine can still be rated the most able general secretary that Congress has ever had. Tewson was an example of a competent second-in-command who proves to lack the abilities required by the top post.

With successive nationalization Acts there were further appointments of trade union officers to the boards of nationalized industries. When Citrine moved to his post as chairman-designate of the Electricity Authority in 1947 his place on the Coal Board was taken by Hallsworth, who had been general secretary of the Distributive and Allied Workers, and a member of the General Council, for twenty-one years. Hallsworth was another trade union leader of outstanding ability, who had taken a prominent part in the work of the General Council as well as running his own union effectively. By 1948 the Council had lost another four members to the nationalized industries. Perhaps the most serious of the four losses to the unions was that of Jim Bowman of the Northumberland Miners, who had been vice-president of the Miners' Federation since 1939; he moved also to the Coal Board.

In 1945 Bevin at last told the executive council of the Transport and General Workers that he would not be returning to his post as general secretary; and Deakin, who had been acting general secretary since 1940, was elected in his place. Although Deakin came much closer to Bevin's standard as a trade union leader than Tewson to Citrine's, he was no Bevin. He had courage and confidence; he understood his job; he was forceful and dependable; but he lacked Bevin's intuition and his powers of persuasion. Bevin, indeed, was the greatest trade union leader Britain has ever had. In Bevin's absence, Charles Dukes of the General and Municipal Workers played a leading part in the General Council and at Congress. In 1946, as has been noted, he was succeeded by Tom Williamson, who was judged the most competent of the national officers of the union who supervised the affairs of, and conducted negotiations in, the various industries in which the union had members. Given the higher status of regional secretaries in the union compared with national officers, this decision may have been due to the failure of any of the regional secretaries to persuade his colleagues that he was the man for the post. Like Tewson and Deakin, Williamson did not match the qualities of his predecessor. He was a competent administrator, but he lacked confidence and charisma.

In the immediate post-war years, therefore, the top leadership of British trade unions fell below the standard of its predecessors who had led the unions before the war and, with the exception of Bevin, through the war years. This change affected both the conduct of union business and the influence of trade unions on the government. But there was

another change that had a substantial effect on the political influence of the unions. During the war the dealings of union leaders with the government had been channelled predominantly through the Ministry of Labour and National Service, and, over matters of importance, with the minister himself. The weight that the unions could bring to bear on the government was massively increased by Bevin's presence in the War Cabinet, and by his standing with Churchill.<sup>30</sup>

After the war, in Attlee's Cabinet, Bevin was no longer a trade union leader seconded to the government; he was a politician in office; and he was no longer Minister of Labour, but Foreign Secretary. He was replaced as Minister of Labour by George Isaacs, previously general secretary of the Operative Printers and Assistants. Isaacs had been a member of the General Council since 1932. Unlike any of his colleagues on the Council at that time, he was also a Member of Parliament, and he had held his seat in subsequent elections. His claim to the ministry was therefore strong, but he, too, was no Bevin. His qualities as a union leader had been equalled or surpassed by several of his former colleagues on the General Council; and he was not accepted by his colleagues in the Labour Cabinet as a unique authority on trade union and working-class reactions, as Bevin had been in Churchill's War Cabinet. Many of his colleagues in the post-war Cabinet would have considered themselves equally authoritative on those subjects.

Bevin, of course, was still in the Cabinet. He kept in touch with his former trade union colleagues when he could, and took part in Cabinet discussions on labour issues when he was available; but he had other onerous and absorbing commitments. He was often abroad, and inevitably, as time passed, his grasp of current industrial relations and trade union questions grew weaker.

### *The Government's Record*

No other British government has come to power with so far-reaching, elaborate, and precise a programme as the Labour government that took office in July 1945. If any government has come anywhere near the achievement of Attlee and his colleagues in that respect, they have not fulfilled their promises as did meticulously as the government of 1945-51. It had a long-standing commitment to repeal the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 which it did as quickly as the parliamentary timetable would allow, and the Act ceased to have effect on 22 May 1946.<sup>31</sup> Repeal of the sections relating to strikes and lockouts

<sup>30</sup> See Ch. 3.

<sup>31</sup> The bill was read a third time in the House of Commons on 2 April 1946, and received royal assent on 22 May 1946.

had no effect on unions or their members, for since 1946 no trade union or employers' association has shown any inclination to engage in any of the forms of industrial action that the Act prohibited—any more than they had while the Act was in force. The repeal of the fifth section, which had forced Civil Service unions to withdraw from Congress and the Labour Party, now allowed them to reaffiliate, and the Civil Service unions were back at Congress in 1946. The repeal of the sixth section, which had forbidden local and other public authorities from imposing a closed shop on their employees, and from requiring their contractors to do likewise, probably had some effect on trade union membership in these areas of employment. However, by far the most significant consequence was the repeal of the fourth section requiring contracting in to trade union political funds, thus reverting to the pre-1927 practice of contracting out by those who did not wish to pay, and giving a substantial boost to trade union membership of the party. At the 1946 conference of the party affiliated trade union members numbered 2,635,346. A year later the figure was 4,386,074.

However, its most important commitment was to full employment. Except during the coal crisis early in 1947, the level of unemployment rarely went much over 2 per cent during its period of office—a staggering record compared with the inter-war years. The government was, however, greatly assisted by the economic climate. Demand remained buoyant both at home and overseas. Most of the time the government had no call to encourage economic expansion; the need was for restraint. The makeshift welfare state which had been cobbled together to meet social needs in wartime was extended and given permanent form. Aneurin Bevan designed the National Health Service, and charmed away or overrode the objections of the British Medical Association to bring it into operation in July 1948—a free service for all, until charges for dentures and spectacles were introduced in the 1951 budget. Another miner, James Griffiths, was responsible for the National Insurance Act of 1946, which embodied Beveridge's plan for a comprehensive universal system of national insurance, and was supplemented by two further measures in 1948—the Industrial Injuries Act and the National Assistance Act. Bevan was also responsible for housing. After a slow start, the number of permanent new houses completed annually rose to 200,000 in 1948, and fell just below that figure in the three subsequent years. In addition there was a considerable increase in the housing stock by means of the repair, renovation, and conversion of existing dwellings, many of which had suffered bomb damage. In 1947 the Minister for Education, Ellen Wilkinson, raised the school-leaving age to 15, without exceptions, and made provision for a subsequent increase to 16.



The full programme of nationalization was carried out. The National Coal Board, with subordinate divisional boards, took over the mines on 1 January 1947. The British Transport Commission took over the main-line railways, the canals, London Transport, the provincial road-passenger transport undertakings (private and municipal), along with some road-haulage undertakings on 1 January 1948, with subordinate functional boards, called 'executives', to manage the several services. On 1 April of the same year the British Electricity Authority and area electricity boards took over the generation and distribution of electricity, and the British Gas Council and area gas boards took over the production and distribution of gas on 1 May 1949. The nationalization of iron and steel, over which the government hesitated, was delayed until after the general election of 1950, but took effect on 15 February 1951. In addition the British Overseas Airways Corporation, which had been set up in 1940, was joined by the British European Airways Corporation; the Cable and Wireless Act gave the Post Office a monopoly of overseas telecommunications services; and the Bank of England was brought under the statutory control of the Treasury. Following the recommendations of the General Council in 'Post-war Reconstruction', all the boards of the nationalized industries, including regional and functional boards where they were established, included members who had been trade union officers up to the time of their appointments. A number of the names of those appointed have already been noted.<sup>32</sup> There was also one notable refusal. At the time of the appointment of the original National Coal Board, Arthur Horner was offered a place which he did not accept.

Two areas in which the achievement of the government fell short of its promises were foreign and imperial policy, and the supervision of private industry. In the first of these areas, it played its full part in the creation and development of the United Nations Organization and carried through the 'advancement of India to responsible self-government, and the planned progress of our Colonial Dependencies'.<sup>33</sup> But it failed to 'consolidate in peace the great war-time association of the British Commonwealth with . . . the USSR',<sup>34</sup> for which the Soviet Union must bear its share of the blame.

In dealing with industries that were not to be nationalized, Labour's election manifesto had promised 'public supervision of monopolies and cartels'<sup>35</sup> which was honoured by the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Act 1948; and 'suitable economic and price controls . . . to secure that . . . every citizen . . . shall get fair play',<sup>36</sup> which it might be said to have gone far towards fulfilling. It is arguable whether or not it produced 'a firm and clear-cut programme for the export trade',<sup>37</sup> but it

<sup>32</sup> See above.<sup>33</sup> *Let Us Face the Future*, 11.<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 7.<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



certainly tried to do so. The shortfall was not in carrying out its own promises but in carrying out the programme of the General Council<sup>38</sup> which its Industrial Organization and Development Act 1947 showed it had adopted. This measure followed the publication of the reports of a number of the seventeen 'working parties', consisting of trade union and employer representatives along with independent members, which Cripps, as president of the Board of Trade, had appointed to inquire into the problems of their industries. Under its provisions, ministers were empowered to appoint similarly tripartite development councils for an industry or a group of industries to promote research, design, standardization, and exports, and improvements in marketing, training, cost accounting, and other relevant techniques; with powers to collect statistics and to impose a levy. The existing Cotton Board<sup>39</sup> was reconstituted as a development council, and councils were also set up for furniture, jewellery and silverware, wool and lace, and clothing; but the latter was soon replaced by a non-statutory Joint Clothing Council, which was terminated by the wool employers in 1954. Failure to make further use of the Act was due to organized opposition of the employers in the other industries concerned.

By contrast, the government amply fulfilled its promise of 'a prosperous and efficient agricultural industry ensuring a fair return to the farmer and the farm worker without excessive prices to the consumer'.<sup>40</sup> Assisted by world shortages in the early post-war years, 'they gave the British farmer a degree of security and, in time, prosperity unknown since the golden age of high farming in the mid-nineteenth century'.<sup>41</sup> The agricultural worker retained the substantial improvement in his earnings relative to other wage-earners that he had obtained during the war, and the consumer was protected by continued rationing and price control.

Nevertheless the government faced a Herculean task in restoring the economy. A series of crises knocked it off course and finally helped to sink it. The first crisis hit it almost as soon as it had assumed office. The United States Congress terminated Lend-Lease on 21 August 1945, only six days after the end of the Japanese war, leaving Britain almost bankrupt. The run-down of the country's assets in the first two years of the war, before Lend-Lease began, the accumulation of debts to the dominions and neutral countries, and the severe curtailment of Britain's export trade meant that time and resources were needed to revive and increase exports to a level far higher than before the war to make up for the loss of overseas assets and to service the debts. Until that was done,

<sup>38</sup> See pp. 275-9.

<sup>39</sup> See p. 220.

<sup>40</sup> *Let Us Face the Future*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Morgan, 304.

disaster could be avoided only by a massive loan from the United States.

By the end of the year a loan had been arranged. A sum of \$3.75 billion, with an interest charge at 2 per cent a year, repayable over fifty years, appeared to be most generous; but there were conditions. Britain was to enter a General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which would limit the government's scope to plan and control foreign trade; and sterling was to be made convertible twelve months after Congress approved the loan, which it did on 15 July 1946. The British government accepted these terms. There were objections from left-wingers in the cabinet and in the Commons, and from Conservatives who saw them as the end of the empire and the sterling area. But there was no viable alternative and no likelihood of negotiating more favourable terms.

Thereafter economic recovery continued at a gratifying pace until the end of 1946. A shortage of coal in the winter of 1946-7 had been foreseen, but it was drastically aggravated early in 1947 by the severest winter weather of the century so far. Transport of coal came almost to a stop. The freeze-up, which had begun on 20 January, lasted well into March.<sup>42</sup> The government's anxieties were increased by dissension over the rising cost of maintaining British troops in many distant lands, until the issue was resolved by withdrawals from Greece, Palestine, and other countries, and the granting of independence to India. In addition, there was in 1947 a sharp rise in the prices of foodstuffs and raw materials, due to shortages. Consequently there was an equally sharp increase in the rate at which the borrowed dollars were being spent. After sterling became convertible on 15 July 1947, the outflow increased dramatically, to well over \$100 million a week. The government decided that convertibility must be suspended, and on 20 August the Americans agreed. There were only \$400 million left.

The government's economic policies were in ruins. It had continued the wartime arrangement whereby responsibility for economic planning lay with the Lord President's committee, and Herbert Morrison was Lord President. However, from January 1946, a smaller group of ministers: Dalton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Cripps, president of the Board of Trade, and Isaacs, Minister of Labour, with Morrison in the chair, was constituted the Ministerial Committee on Economic Planning. It was 'advised at the official level by the Steering Committee on Economic Development, presided over by Sir Edward Bridges. . . . The chief defect of this machinery was that Morrison had neither the authority nor the time to make it work.'<sup>43</sup> Its weakness was exposed by the fuel crisis. Over the months leading up to the crisis, the committee

<sup>42</sup> See above.

<sup>43</sup> Alec Cairncross, *Years of Recovery* (London: Methuen, 1985), 51.

and the government 'could do little or nothing against the entrenched and determined authority of the Minister of Fuel and Power',<sup>44</sup> Shinwell.

It was agreed that there must be a change in the running of the economy. In March 1947 Sir Edwin Plowden, who had demonstrated his managerial skills during the war at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, was appointed chief planning officer to supervise an interdepartmental planning staff, and in July the names were announced of the members of the Economic Planning Board which he was to chair. In September Cripps was moved from the Board of Trade, where he was replaced by Harold Wilson, to the new post of Minister of Economic Affairs, whose responsibilities included Plowden's planning board and staff, along with the Economic Information Unit. The centralization of economic planning and control was completed in November when Dalton resigned as Chancellor of the Exchequer after revealing some of the proposals of his autumn budget to a journalist in time for them to appear in the press before his speech to the House was finished. Cripps took his place, bringing with him his powers and staff as Minister of Economic Affairs. The Treasury was now in sole control of economic planning and of the co-ordination of the economic departments.

Cripps set about curtailing domestic expenditure and imports, and expanding output and exports; but these steps by themselves would not have produced the rapid recovery in the British economy which began to show itself in 1948. Cripps was greatly assisted by the European Recovery Programme which was financed by the United States.<sup>45</sup>

In 1948 British exports reached their highest figure since 1929, and were half as much again as in 1938; industrial production was 12 per cent above the 1947 figure; and the deficit in the balance of payments was almost wiped out. Cripps and Wilson took advantage of the recovery to begin dismantling the economic controls that had survived from the war. However, their confidence was premature. By the spring of 1949 Britain was running into deficit again, and dollars were once more flowing out. On this occasion the cause of the trouble was an unexpected depression in the American economy which cut back Britain's dollar earnings.

One possible remedy was a devaluation of sterling. Cripps did not want it, but he was sick, and had gone to a sanatorium in Zurich for treatment. Responsibility for economic policy was shared between three men: Wilson, Douglas Jay, who was a junior minister at the Treasury,

<sup>44</sup> D. N. Chester, 'Machinery of Government and Planning' in G. D. N. Worswick and P. H. Ady (eds.), *The British Economy 1945-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1952), 343.

<sup>45</sup> See pp. 355-6.

and Hugh Gaitskell, who had replaced Shinwell as Minister of Fuel and Power. Taking the lead, Gaitskell convinced his colleagues, and senior ministers, that sterling must be devalued. The decision was almost finalized by the time Cripps returned from Switzerland, and on 29 August 1949 the Cabinet approved a devaluation of sterling by almost a third, from \$4.03 to \$2.80 to the pound. The announcement was delayed until 19 September for Bevin and Cripps to go to Washington to explain it to the Americans. Devaluation of this order inevitably raised the British price level, but it had the desired effect on overseas trade. The deficit in the balance of payments had almost disappeared again by the end of the year; and, with a recovery in the American economy in 1950, British exports to the United States and Canada rose rapidly. Attlee decided that it was a favourable moment for the government to go to the country.

'The general election of February 1950 was a less intense and memorable affair than the campaign of 1945.'<sup>46</sup> The Labour manifesto, *Let Us Win Through Together*, contained some proposals for further nationalization, but the party did not emphasize nationalization in its campaign. 'Most Labour broadcasters gave it merely a passing mention. A good deal was made of the social services and about the merits . . . of Labour's planning.'<sup>47</sup> Above all the government's other achievements, the Labour campaign emphasized full employment. There was not a single broadcast . . . in which this theme did not appear, and there was one—Mr. Griffiths'—which was dominated by it.'<sup>48</sup> The Conservative spokesmen were 'defensive' in reply to Labour attacks on their record on employment before the war. Their dominant theme was '“anti-socialism” . . . defined sometimes as opposition to nationalisation, but more often in terms of a general hostility to controls, bureaucracy, expansion of State power and interference with liberty.'<sup>49</sup> In November 1949 the opinion polls had put the Conservatives well ahead of Labour, with 48 per cent of the sample intending to vote for them compared with 38 per cent for Labour, but by the end of January Labour had a marginal lead, which was retained in subsequent polls. These proved to be accurate forecasts. Polling-day was 23 February. Due to the closeness of the result, there was an unusually long wait before the outcome was certain. With a vote of 13.3 million, Labour had 315 seats compared with 12.6 million votes and 298 seats for the Conservatives. The Liberals' 2.8 million votes brought them no more than nine seats. Three seats were won by other parties, giving Labour a majority of five.

The government resumed its work. For some months all went well.

<sup>46</sup> Morgan, 403.

<sup>47</sup> H. G. Nicholas, *The British General Election, 1950* (London: Macmillan, 1951), 129.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



The North American recovery was sustained. British industrial production and exports continued to rise. At the end of the year the balance of payments showed a substantial surplus; but by that time the government's next and final economic crisis was upon them. On 25 June 1950 North Korea, a Chinese satellite, invaded South Korea, which was occupied by the United States army. Britain voted with the United States at the United Nations Security Council for military aid to South Korea. Troops were sent from Hong Kong to support the American forces in Korea commanded by General MacArthur, to be joined later by other British units. Britain's defence programme was substantially increased. By this time Gaitskell was Chancellor of the Exchequer, having taken over from Cripps whose health had worsened. It therefore fell to Gaitskell to find the money for this accelerated rearmament programme. More troubles at home and abroad accumulated during 1951, and in September of that year Attlee asked for a dissolution. In the subsequent election the Conservatives won 321 seats to Labour's 295, and Attlee resigned. Churchill became Prime Minister again at the age of 77.

*Collective Bargaining 1945-1947: Hours of Work*

Against the background of a description of changes in union organization and leadership, and a brief survey of the government's record, it is now appropriate to turn to post-war developments in collective bargaining. Before the war ended, both the Ministry of Labour and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress had been considering how collective bargaining should be regulated after the war. The ministry's contribution was the Wages Councils Act of 1945, 'intended by Ernest Bevin to become the statutory foundation of a comprehensive system of industrial relations'<sup>50</sup> and to prevent a repetition of the collapse of much of the machinery of collective bargaining that had occurred after the First World War in the depression of 1921-2. The Act renamed trade boards 'wages councils', and the criteria for their establishment were revised along with their purposes and powers. The test of the need for statutory regulation was no longer to be, as it had been under the Act of 1909, 'exceptionally low wages'. It was to be the finding of a commission of inquiry, consisting of two representatives of the employers and two of the workers, along with three independent members, that 'voluntary machinery is not and cannot be made adequate or does not exist or is likely to cease to exist or be adequate and that as a result a reasonable standard of remuneration is not being or will not be

<sup>50</sup> Bayliss, 53.

maintained'.<sup>51</sup> The initiative for setting the procedure to establish a council in motion was thus given to unions and employers in the industry concerned. 'Indeed the whole tenor of the Act was that if employers and trade unions wanted a Wages Council they must be allowed to have one.'<sup>52</sup>

As to their powers, wages councils were not limited, as trade boards had been, to fixing 'minimum rates'. They were to set 'minimum remuneration', which covered every aspect of pay, including, for example, a guaranteed week. The Holidays with Pay Act of 1938, had empowered trade boards to prescribe annual holidays with pay of up to one week. No such limitation applied to the power of wages councils to provide for holidays. Moreover, had the 1939-45 war been followed by an economic depression which threatened to undermine collective bargaining as the 1921-2 depression had done, the Act could have been used to convert voluntary bargaining arrangements into wages councils whose existence would be protected by law and whose powers would be statutory.

An even wider guarantee of existing collective agreements against erosion by depression was provided by part 3 of the Act, which continued, for five years after Order 1305<sup>53</sup> ceased to be effective, the obligation placed on *all* employers by the order to observe 'recognised terms and conditions'. Order 1305 was due to run until February 1946. At the Trades Union Congress in 1945 the General Council reported that a resolution seeking the 'abolition of compulsory arbitration as soon as possible after the end of hostilities' was withdrawn 'on condition that it was considered by the General Council'. It went on to say that it was 'in complete agreement regarding the abolition of compulsory arbitration at the earliest possible date'.<sup>54</sup> However, when the matter was considered by the Joint Consultative Committee on 14 December 1945, it was clear that some of the union leaders were having second thoughts. The General Council's spokesman, Hallsworth, explained that, although the Council 'as a whole' was in favour of ending compulsory arbitration, the members of the Council then present thought there was a case for keeping it. The item was therefore deferred to allow the union leaders to come to a firm decision. At its meeting on 19 December, the full General Council discussed various courses of action, and referred the matter to its 'inner cabinet', the Finance and General Purposes Committee, which met, along with those trade union members of the Joint Consultative Committee who were not members of that committee, on 14 January 1946. A paper had been circulated which pointed

<sup>51</sup> Wages Councils Act 1945, section 4(4).

<sup>52</sup> Bayliss, 57.

<sup>53</sup> See p. 179.

<sup>54</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1945), 165.

out that the essential question was whether the right to strike should be restored. In the end the meeting concluded that 'it was not in the interests of the Trade Union Movement or the nation as a whole to demand the abolition of compulsory arbitration at the present time'. Among the considerations that swayed their decision was the view that in favourable bargaining conditions for the unions, such as currently existed, 'unless there was a curb on extravagant and unreasonable claims by new elements with the least degree of responsibility, sporadic and abortive strikes might result which would be beneficial to nobody.' The meeting does not appear to have considered what should be done if irresponsible elements provoked strikes despite the retention of the order. Nor do the minutes record any precise indication as to who the 'new elements' were. However, the meeting went on to note that, with the 1927 Act due to be repealed, the termination of the order would 'encourage the campaign which was being tentatively developed in some quarters to secure the abolition of all controls', which, they feared, would lead to 'tremendous inflation'.

Meanwhile, the General Council had gone further than ever before towards co-ordinating the claims for improved conditions of employment submitted to employers by unions affiliated to Congress. It noted that one of the few achievements of collective bargaining in Britain at the end of the First World War which had survived the subsequent depression was the reduction of the length of the standard working week for most manual workers from more than fifty hours to forty-seven or forty-eight hours. It had 'made strenuous efforts through the International Labour Organisation to secure a further reduction . . . to forty hours, without success'.<sup>55</sup> In 1944 it proposed that the campaign for a forty-hour working week should be taken up again, not through the International Labour Organization, but by promoting legislation. A bill should be drafted to allow each industry's negotiators to settle the details to suit their circumstances; but should an industry fail to comply with the principle, the Minister of Labour was to be empowered to require its negotiators to submit a draft scheme to him. If they failed to do so, he was himself to draw up a scheme, and to impose it, after such consultation as he was able to arrange.<sup>56</sup>

The proposal was circulated to affiliated unions, the overwhelming majority of which gave it their support. Most of them were also in favour of making the change by means of a single reduction of seven or eight hours, as the case might be, rather than in two reductions of four hours, or one of four and another of three. The Council hoped to secure 'the adoption of the reform immediately on the conclusion of hostilities', and

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), 166.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 166-7.



its enquiries revealed that many unions had already approached their employers with claims, while others were preparing their cases for submission.<sup>57</sup> By this time another objective had been added. The 1944 meeting of Congress had carried a resolution coupling the introduction of a second week's holiday with pay to the forty-hour week. In addition the resolution proposed that both reforms should be adopted internationally by means of their inclusion in the peace treaty;<sup>58</sup> and the General Council accordingly secured their inclusion in the declaration of the World Trade Union Conference on post-war reconstruction.

During 1945 and 1946 many unions were including claims for a forty-hour week and a second week of holidays with pay along with their pay-claims. The Engineering Joint Trades Movement had done so in its claim to the engineering employers which it put in during 1944 and which was settled for 22½p a week for male workers in April 1945; but the Engineering Employers' Federation had forestalled it. On 26 October 1944 it had approved the opinion of its policy committee which was 'unanimously opposed' to conceding a shorter working week. The committee had noted the proposal of the Trades Union Congress, and suggested that the federation's reply to the unions should deal with the issue 'in its wider aspects'. The management board agreed. In its view, 'a definite and firm view on the part of the Federation would reinforce the Employers in certain other industries who gave the impression of being rather less emphatic in their views'. As for the claim for a second week's holiday, 'efforts should be made to get the workpeople and the public generally to realise that the Employers could not seriously consider such applications at the present time when the future of British industry was subject to the uncertainty of international conditions after the war'.

There was justification for the board's reactions to the two claims. The records of the General Council and its committees give no indication that in planning its campaign for these two concessions it had made any attempt to estimate their costs; but the employers had to take them into account. Unless there was a consequential increase in effort and efficiency, or both, a reduction from forty-eight to forty hours a week might be expected to increase labour costs by about 17 per cent; and in engineering, where the current working week was forty-seven hours, a switch to forty hours might be expected to raise labour costs by nearly 16 per cent. On the assumption that an extra week's holiday would not increase effort or efficiency, it would add about 2 per cent to labour costs. In engineering, moreover, the management board meeting on 31 January had been told by its policy committee that 'there was a

<sup>57</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1945), 174.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), 306-7.



prevalence of view among many federated members that workpeople in the Engineering Industry are not working up to pre-war standards with the result that production was disappointing?

Before long, however, it was evident that trade union opinion on the feasibility of achieving a forty-hour week had begun to wane. When the General Council met on 6 September 1945, just before the opening of that year's Congress, Citrine told his colleagues that he had made contact with some of the members of the new Labour government, 'and he was of the opinion that there was a willingness on the part of the Ministers to co-operate with the General Council'. Later at the same meeting, he suggested that unions 'endeavour to get it [the forty-hour week] by stages', otherwise they risked accusations of being 'anti-social'. It is understandable that Labour ministers should share the apprehension of employers about the cost of a reduction of seven or eight hours in the working week; and that Citrine's opinion would have been passed around among the delegates to Congress which met four days later, and would have influenced their plans for submitting claims for a shorter working week.

Certainly the first unions to settle their claims did not insist on forty hours. In February 1946 the several joint industrial councils in the clothing trades agreed to introduce a working week of forty-four hours. In September 1946 the National Arbitration Tribunal gave further impetus to the trend by awarding a working week of forty-three and a half hours in the hosiery industry. In October the cotton industry introduced a working week of forty-five hours, which conveniently allowed the introduction of a five-day working week of nine hours a day, thus avoiding the Saturday morning shift, and conferring a boon on working wives and mothers. From the employers' point of view the Saturday shift had the disadvantage of a high rate of absenteeism. Like cotton, the clothing and hosiery labour forces included a high proportion of women employees.

The printing industry has a record of pioneering new developments in collective bargaining. It had achieved a forty-five-hour working week before the war, in 1937,<sup>59</sup> and the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation now became the first trade union negotiating body to insist on a working week of substantially less than forty-four hours. Like most other union negotiators, it had asked for a forty-hour week, which it wanted to be worked over five days, and a second week of annual holidays. The employers readily conceded the extra week's holiday and the five-day week where their employees wanted it, but initially they would make no concession on the length of the working week. The threat of an overtime ban brought an offer of a reduction of an hour to

<sup>59</sup> See pp. 47-8.

forty-four. The unions refused to settle for less than a cut of two and a half hours to forty-two and a half hours a week. At this point the Newspaper Society, whose members, because of the extreme perishability of their product, were exceptionally vulnerable to industrial action, agreed to the unions' figure, leaving the Federation of Master Printers to continue the dispute. The unions imposed their ban, and in September 1946 a court of inquiry was appointed, under the chairmanship of William Gorman.

The Master Printers' spokesman told the court that his members would have too few employees to fulfil their orders if they accepted the forty-hour week. The unions replied that there were some unemployed printing workers, and others would soon be demobilized from the forces; and that some workers in the newspaper section were redundant. In its report the court found that 'some shortening of hours would be beneficial to the productive capacity of the individual worker', but was confident that there would be a 'substantial loss of production if the claims of the Trade Unions are granted in full'. Consequently it was able, with enviable precision, to discern that the balance should be struck at forty-three and a half hours, only half an hour less than the employers had offered. Equally notable was the pomposity of its final passage. The forty-hour week was, it said,

a national issue. In the course of our Inquiry, it was said that statements on this subject have been made by His Majesty's Government. We wish, however, to make it clear—and to this we wish to give all possible emphasis—that in arriving at our conclusions we have been solely concerned with our terms of reference and the contentions of the parties . . . and we have had no other considerations in our minds.<sup>60</sup>

The employers offered the recommended forty-three and a half hours. The unions imposed their threatened overtime ban, and began to conduct a strike ballot. However, the two sides were summoned to the Ministry of Labour, where they were told that 'the Cabinet were considering taking drastic action, such as issuing an order under defence regulations compelling employers to work on electoral registers, and compelling workers to work overtime if required. The emergency arose from the need to complete the papers for municipal elections due in November.'<sup>61</sup> The unions called off their ban, and dropped the ballot. The employers offered, in addition to the 43½-hour working week, a further reduction of an hour a week in a year's time. They also waived the stabilization clause in their 1945 pay settlement, allowing them to offer a pay increase of 50p a week to men and 37½p for women. The

<sup>60</sup> Court of Inquiry into a Dispute between the British Federation of Master Printers and the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, *Report*, Cmd. 6912 (1946).

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Child, 302.

unions put this package of concessions to a ballot, in which it was accepted by a majority of three to one.

In the summer of 1944 the Engineers' national committee had decided on a pay-claim for £1 a week, and instructed its executive council to draw up a new wage structure 'embracing all grades and which will relate the basic rate of the lowest grade to human needs'.<sup>62</sup> The council presented its proposals to the meeting of the national committee in 1945. Among other things, they comprised minimum rates of £5.30 for a time-worker and £6.07 for a piece-worker, rising to £6.90 and £7.87 for those who were fully skilled, with equal pay for women.<sup>63</sup> These proposals were approved by the other engineering unions at a meeting of the Engineering Joint Trades Movement, with an addition: a guaranteed week to replace the relevant provision of the Essential Work Order. At the beginning of 1946 all the proposals were submitted to the Engineering Employers' Federation, along with a reminder of the claims for a forty-hour working week and an additional week's holiday, which had now both been with the employers for a year.

Opinion in the employers' federation had softened since the management board approved its policy committee's recommendations of rigid opposition to a reduction of the working week as an example to other employers. On 28 February 1946 the board decided to ask its local associations to authorize negotiations on all the unions' demands. The member firms voted 99 to 1 in favour. The negotiating committee agreed with the unions at a conference on 3 April to increase weekly wage rates for men by 30p a week, although this was 5p a week more than the management board had authorized. A guarantee of a minimum of thirty-four hours' pay was also included; and a joint committee was set up to examine the industry's pay structure, and commissioned to deal also with the claim for a forty-hour working week. At a further conference on 3 May the employers' negotiating committee offered an increase of 22½p a week for women. The unions rejected the offer because it would widen the differential between the sexes instead of moving towards their objective of equal pay, and said that they would accept nothing less than 37½p; but they agreed to refer the difference to the National Arbitration Tribunal which awarded the figure that the employers had offered.

The discussions of the joint wage-structure committee on the length of the working week were complicated by differences concerning the number of days over which it should be spread. Hitherto the federation had refused to countenance a five-day working week, but Raleigh Cycles, which worked five days, had applied to join the Nottingham

<sup>62</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (July 1944).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* (July 1945).

association. The association was ready to admit it, subject to the approval of the management board. At its meeting on 21 March 1946 the board noted that support for the five-day working week among federated firms was increasing; but the unions would not countenance it, unless their members were paid overtime for the extra hours that would have to be worked on weekdays in order that the standard of forty-seven hours could be spread over five days. This objection would, of course, disappear if the standard working week was reduced sufficiently to leave no need for a Saturday shift. After further prolonged discussions, in which the employers tried out various alternative ways round the difficulty, and the unions made counter-proposals, the management board finally authorized negotiations on the basis of a forty-four-hour week, which were successful. The forty-four hours were to be worked in either five and a half or five days a week. Existing hourly rates and piece-work times and prices were not to be altered; instead the weekly amount of the national bonus was to be increased by 22½p for men. It followed that workers who wanted to maintain their full earnings when the new agreement came into force would have to supplement the increase in the national bonus a little by extra overtime or higher output under piece-work.

The shipbuilding industry normally followed the engineering industry in matters such as this; but there was a problem over doing so in this instance. The ship-repair section needed daylight for its work, and if its forty-four-hour week was spread over five days in the winter months, it would be forced to stop work before the end of the working day. The shipbuilding employers were adamant that the two sections of their industry must both accept the same pattern of working week. The problem was referred to a court of inquiry chaired by Sir John Forster, which proposed that the industry should work forty-four hours spread over five and a half days from the beginning of November to the end of February, and work the forty-four hours over five days for the rest of the year. It was also concerned to suggest ways in which any loss of production due to the shorter working week might be offset, and called attention to the practice of 'spelling'—gangs of workers or parts of gangs alternately taking spells of rest—pointing out that 'if workers were prepared to work the full hours of each working day the loss of production through the introduction of the 44-hour week could be reduced'. The report was published in February 1947, and agreement followed. There are no records available to show what was the effect of its homily on 'spelling', if any.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Court of Inquiry into a Dispute in the Shipbuilding and Shiprepairing Industry, *Report*, Cmd. 7036 (1947). If some of the tales told of the shipyards are true, an end to spelling would have wiped out the loss, and more.



Another court of inquiry was appointed in January 1947 to report on a dispute over the claim for a forty-four-hour working week, along with two weeks' holidays with pay, in road haulage, and the termination of the practice of the 'accumulative week', whereby, regardless of the hours worked on any day, overtime rates applied only after the full number of hours specified in the agreement as the standard working week had been completed. Although the claim had been submitted in May 1946, the Road Haulage Wages Board did not make its decision until November, and then the only concession was an increase in the annual holidays from a week to nine days.

On 1 January 1947 an unofficial strike of road-haulage employees began in London, and within a few days 'dockers at Tilbury and London and market porters, and wholesale provision and cold storage workers in various centres had ceased work in support', until some 40,000 workers in all were on strike.<sup>65</sup> On 13 January another meeting of the board 'proved abortive . . . owing to legal difficulties',<sup>66</sup> and Deakin suggested to the employers that they join with the unions in bypassing the board by setting up a voluntary joint industrial council for the Road Haulage Industry. This was done, and the new body met on 16 January to register 'failure to agree', thus creating an official industrial dispute, which made it possible for the Minister of Labour to intervene by setting up a court of inquiry, chaired by Lord Terrington. Having heard the two sides, the court decided that the increase of two days in the annual holiday was 'reasonable and equitable',<sup>67</sup> (although other industries were settling for a second week), but proposed a working week of forty-four hours, with all hours in excess of each normal working day to be paid at overtime rates. In addition its report went on to welcome the formation of the new joint industrial council, which 'will be able to deal with the many difficult problems which will face the industry from time to time, and in particular the most economical use of manpower'.

A fourth court of inquiry into a dispute over a claim for a forty-four-hour working week was appointed to investigate that issue on the railways—along with a wage-claim. Normally such a court consists of an employer and a trade union officer, both from industries not concerned with the dispute at issue, along with an independent chairman. In this instance there were, in addition to the employer, the trade union officer and the chairman, C. W. Guillebaud, a Cambridge economist, two further independent members, both experienced in chairing such bodies. The strength of the team indicated the importance that the Minister of Labour attached to the dispute.

<sup>65</sup> 'Principal Disputes of 1947', *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Jan. 1948).

<sup>66</sup> Court of Inquiry into a Dispute between the Two Sides of the National Joint Industrial Council for the Road Haulage Industry, *Report*, Cmd. 7025 (1947).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

The railway unions had refused to allow their claim to be submitted to their own arbitral body, the Railway Staff National Tribunal—as they were perfectly entitled to do since reference to the tribunal required the consent of both parties. Their objection was that, so long as Order 1305 remained in force, they were bound by an agreement of 19 June 1940 to accept the tribunal's decision as 'final and binding'. The unions and the railway companies had signed this agreement in order to be able to use their own tribunal instead of the National Arbitration Tribunal which had been set up to issue binding awards. The National Union of Railwaymen now feared that 'the tribunal, one of whose members was a nominee of the railway companies, would concede very little so long as it knew that its award would not be turned down'.<sup>68</sup> On 23 May 1947 the three railway unions had seen the Ministers of Labour and Transport to press their objections to the National Arbitration Tribunal, and the appointment of the court was announced on 28 May.

The report of the court did not follow the established pattern for such reports. There was no account of the origins and development of the dispute. Instead the report opened with a summary of the submissions of the two sides, and went on to note that the railway companies had informed the minister that in view of the impending nationalization of the railways under the Transport Bill, which 'had now been passed in the House of Commons, they could not assume the responsibility for dealing with the present claims. The cost of any settlement would fall on the Government, and the companies did not wish to take any action which might embarrass the Government or commit the proposed Transport Commission.'<sup>69</sup> The report then turned to the 'one overriding conclusion to which everything else seems to us subordinate. We are convinced that there is an urgent need for detailed and exhaustive consideration for the whole grading of the various classes, scales and categories which make up the complicated structure of the railway service.'<sup>70</sup> The court did not believe that it was the appropriate body to tackle that task, and the companies 'had not felt themselves in a position to discuss or argue the merits of the claims'.<sup>71</sup>

In the circumstances an unusually heavy responsibility rested on the members of the court. Happily they understood the function of a court of inquiry much better than Gorman and his colleagues in the printing dispute. Such a court is appointed when everyone concerned with the issue has done his or her best to settle it. The members of the court are disinterested parties brought in from outside to recommend terms that both sides will accept. They do not have to take as the primary test of

<sup>68</sup> Bagwell, 607.

<sup>69</sup> Court of Inquiry into Applications by Trade Unions representing Employees of the Railway Companies, Cmd. 7161 (June 1947) 22.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

those terms what will be the most logical solution, or the most economical, or the most likely to please the public or the press; but they must be accepted by both sides so that the dispute will be settled. On this occasion, having confused the issue by asserting that the 'urgent need' was for an overhaul of the whole pay structure which only the parties were qualified to undertake, they proposed 'as an interim measure' that wage rates should be increased by 37½p a week, and salaries by £19.50 a year, and that the standard working week on the railways should be reduced from forty-eight to forty-four hours without loss of pay. These terms were accepted.

It is of course possible in an industrial dispute that there are no terms on which the parties can agree without a trial of strength. This had been the case in the dispute over a reduction in the working week on London Transport's buses in 1937.<sup>72</sup> In such an instance a court of inquiry cannot resolve the dispute. On that occasion the court that was established discovered that the union—or rather the busmen's rank-and-file movement—was determined to get at least half an hour off the working day, and that the London Passenger Transport Board was equally determined that it could not afford it, so it sought refuge in the busmen's complaint that their job was injurious to their health and the only remedy was a reduction in the length of the working week. It proposed that this complaint be referred to a qualified tribunal, and action taken according to its findings. This proposal did not avert the strike, but there was no better alternative for the court, and by appointing the court the Ministry of Labour had shown that it had done its best to get a settlement.

During 1947 the standard working week was reduced to forty-four or forty-five hours in a number of industries besides those so far mentioned. They included coalmining, road passenger transport, civil engineering, electrical contracting, gas supply, footwear manufacture, several food-manufacturing industries, and the retail trades. That year was, in fact, the peak year for the change. In 1946 the number of manual workers whose standard working week was reduced to forty-four or forty-five hours was a little over 2.1 million. In 1947 the total was 5.2 million; in 1948 it was a little over 600,000; in 1949 it just topped one million; but in 1950 it was down to 100,000, and to 10,000 in 1951.<sup>73</sup>

In most private industries the hours of work of salaried staff, along with other conditions of employment, were settled by management without reference to trade unions. In engineering, by contrast, the employers' federation now recognized that such topics were appropriate for discussion between their staff committee and the staff unions

<sup>72</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Jan. 1953).



recognized as representing staff in their industry. On 19 December 1946, when the agreement on a forty-four-hour working week for manual employees lacked only the final signatures, the management board accepted a suggestion from its staff committee that it should put a proposal to the staff unions that henceforth staff should work a forty-hour week, at current salaries, over five days. This was done, but on 15 January 1947 the staff committee reported back to the board that the unions had rejected the proposal as being unfair to those staff employees already working less than forty hours a week. Its counter-proposal had been that those currently working forty and a half hours a week or more should now work a forty-hour week; that those currently working between thirty-eight and a half and forty and a half hours should henceforth work a thirty-eight-hour week; and that there should be no change for those currently working thirty-eight hours or less. The management board now accepted the second and third proposals of the staff unions, but authorized the committee to settle for an overall maximum of thirty-nine hours a week—one of the rare examples of employers offering trade unions better terms than they had asked for. The deal was struck.

During the war the Civil Service unions had agreed that their members should work a longer working week than had been prescribed by their pre-war terms of employment. After the war it was arranged that they should revert to the pre-war standards, and no further substantial change was made until the Priestley Commission reported in 1956. Hours of work in local-government offices were one of the items included in the national code of conditions drawn up in 1946 by the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Administrative Professional Technical and Clerical Staffs; but the code was a recommendation only, and by no means all the authorities observed it.<sup>74</sup>

Hours of duty were also one of the issues that the new negotiating bodies in the health services would have to settle. Already in March 1946 the Mental Hospital Board in the West Riding had introduced a ninety-six-hour fortnight<sup>75</sup>—not such a generous concession at a time when claims for a forty-four-hour week were being presented on behalf of manual workers in other industries, but it was an improvement. By the end of the year the change had not improved recruitment, but 'absenteeism had been very greatly reduced' and there was 'a very much happier feeling about the hospitals'.<sup>76</sup> The boards of the new nationalized industries were all subject to an obligation set out in the statutes that established them to set up machinery for collective

<sup>74</sup> Spoor, 240-43.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* (Dec. 1946).

<sup>75</sup> *Health Services Journal* (Mar. 1946).



bargaining and for joint consultation with the unions representing their employees, including white-collar employees. In some industries, such as the railways and coalmining, this requirement made little difference to white-collar staff except at the higher levels. In passenger road transport and in gas and electricity supply the requirement made relatively little difference to the white-collar staffs of formerly municipal undertakings, but had a greater effect on the formerly company undertakings. In any event, nationalization meant that henceforth the hours of work of white-collar staffs in nationalized undertakings would be governed by agreements with their unions.

Before 1946 the hours of work of farmworkers had been settled county by county, and at the beginning of that year they varied between forty eight and fifty-two a week. During the year the Agricultural Wages Board standardized the working week throughout the country at forty-eight hours. As long ago as 1923 the working week in building had been fixed at forty-four hours in winter and forty-six and a half in summer, with a local option to settle for forty-four hours in summer as well. The exercise of the option eventually brought a standard working week of forty-four hours throughout the country by October 1960.

So far wage negotiations after the war have been mentioned only where they were incidental to negotiations for a reduction in the working week. These latter claims caused more controversy and attracted more attention and concern on the part of unions, employers, and the government than did many of the wage-claims of the period. This contrast can be explained by the greater permanence of the effects of changes in the working week. Apart from the Civil Service in wartime, there are few examples in Britain of agreements to *lengthen* the working week, whereas wage increases in prosperous times have often been followed by wage reductions in depression. Moreover, the effect of wage increases may often be eroded by an increase in prices, but there is no similar process to erode the effect of agreements to introduce a shorter working week.

Given these circumstances it is not surprising that movements for a shorter working week have occurred at considerable intervals of as many as twenty and thirty years. Employers are therefore aware that a reduction in the working week is likely to make a more permanent addition to their costs than a wage increase does, and to offer firmer opposition to it, except when it becomes clear, as it had done by the end of 1946, that a wave of such reductions is in progress and has become unstoppable—all the more so because the government had shown that where a reduction in the working week was not granted by the employers, it would appoint a court of inquiry, and the courts had shown that they would recommend in favour of a reduction. Even so, there

were strikes on the issue. In 1947, the peak year for such reductions, when 5.2 million workers secured an average reduction of 3.52 hours a week,<sup>77</sup> the proportion of days lost in strikes over hours of work was 18.7 per cent, the highest figure for such strikes in any year since 1925, higher than even in 1937, the year of the London bus strike over the claim for a 7½-hour day.<sup>78</sup>

During the immediate post-war years, pay issues outnumbered every other recorded cause of strikes by a wide margin, and accounted for a much larger number of working days lost through strikes each year than any of the other causes, although in most of those years strikes over pay did not account, as they had often done before, for more than half the strikes or for more than half the days lost through strikes. In 1945 a single strike in the docks over pay accounted for the loss of more than half the days lost that year in strikes over pay, and for more than a third of all the days lost in strikes for all causes in that year.

There had been unrest in the docks at the beginning of the year over the provisions of the Dock Labour Scheme. In February 1945 an unofficial strike in London over the moving of a 'call-on stand' had led to 'a series of complaints in regard to the Dock Labour Scheme in the port, with particular reference to the disciplinary machinery'.<sup>79</sup> The scheme had been introduced for the duration of the war only, and there would have to be negotiations, probably following an inquiry, to determine what should take its place afterwards; and among other things, discipline would have to be one of the issues to be covered. However, in September 1945, before there had been any inquiry or negotiations concerning the scheme, the unions submitted a demand for a permanent scheme of decasualization, along with an increase of 45p in the docker's daily rate of pay from 80p to £1.25—far beyond any wage increase in another industry at that time. Soon after the claim had been put in, an unofficial stoppage at Birkenhead over the rate for unloading pit-props spread to Liverpool. The issue was soon settled, but by that time the strike had become a strike, still unofficial, in support of the national claims, 'and spread in October to Liverpool, Hull, Manchester and various other ports, involving altogether some 50,000 workers'.<sup>80</sup> Liverpool was the key to a settlement, for the strikers at other ports agreed to stay out until their colleagues in Liverpool decided to go back to work. Postal ballots were conducted in Liverpool, Manchester, Grimsby, and Immingham, 'under the supervision and to the satisfaction of Officials of the Ministry of Labour'. All of them showed substantial majorities for a return to work, and the unofficial strike committee

<sup>77</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Jan. 1948).

<sup>78</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, General Executive Council, *Minutes* (5 Mar. 1945).

<sup>80</sup> 'Principal Disputes of 1945', *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Apr. 1946).

instructed the men to go back to work 'on the basis of a 30-day truce'.<sup>81</sup> They went back on 5 November, and national negotiations took over. The total loss of working days was recorded as 1.1 million.

On 27 November the unions rejected an offer of an increase from 80p to 90p in their daily rate, although a formula for piece-work was accepted. The Minister of Labour appointed a committee of investigation—possibly a slightly less formal body than a court of inquiry; if indeed there is any difference between the two beyond the title. On 21 December this committee proposed an increase of 15p to 95p. Since the dockers already enjoyed a forty-four-hour week, which had been granted to them in 1920 by the most famous court of inquiry of all, chaired by Lord Shaw, at which Bevin confirmed his reputation as an advocate unequalled in the trade union movement,<sup>82</sup> this increase, which was accepted, enhanced their weekly rate by 82½p, well beyond the figures being achieved by other unions at this time. The parties then began negotiations on their new scheme of decasualization, which was now to be a truly national scheme, since the dockers at Liverpool and Birkenhead had decided to allow their separate Ministry of War Transport Scheme to lapse.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Nationalization and Industrial Democracy*

Looking back at the record of the post-war Labour government, it might appear that their reform of the system of social security and the creation of the National Health Service were their main contributions to the reconstruction of the social and economic order in Britain. At the time, however, there can be little doubt that more importance was attached to their programme of the nationalization of industry, both by the government themselves, and by the employers, the unions, and the general public. Three groups of industries were included in the programme: fuel and power, transport, and iron and steel. The first group, however, was brought into public ownership by means of three separate statutes, which created the National Coal Board; the British Electricity Authority and fourteen area boards (the former having direct control over power stations and high-voltage transmission, and the area boards having responsibility for distribution to consumers);<sup>84</sup> and the area gas boards over which the Gas Council exercised certain limited

<sup>81</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, General Executive Council, *Minutes* (9 Nov. 1945).

<sup>82</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 257–8.

<sup>83</sup> Transport and General Workers' Union, General Executive Council, *Minutes* (5 Mar. 1946). For the Ministry of Transport Scheme at Liverpool and Birkenhead see Ch. 3.

<sup>84</sup> A separate North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, created by a statute of 1943, remained in existence.

powers. By contrast the several branches of the transport industry were nationalized by a single statute. Since one of the main objects of the advocates of transport nationalization was the co-ordination of transport, which they believed would yield substantial economies, overall control was given to a British Transport Commission, which was to co-ordinate the work of six 'executives': for the railways; for hotels previously owned by the railway companies, and for restaurant cars and refreshment rooms; for road passenger transport in the provinces; for the services then managed by the London Passenger Transport Board; for road haulage; and for docks and inland waterways.

Iron-and-steel nationalization does not need much comment, for although the relevant Act received royal assent on 24 November 1949, vesting day was left until after the general election of 1950. Labour having won a marginal victory, it was announced for 25 February 1951, only a few months before the Conservatives won the election of that year. Since the method of nationalization chosen here was to vest the securities of the important companies in the earlier stages of the industry in the Iron and Steel Corporation created by the nationalization statute, which thus became a holding company, and since the corporation allowed the companies to carry on much as they had done before, it made little impact on the industry, and the operating companies had only to wait for the new government to denationalize the industry, as it had promised to do, in order to resume business as before.

Although the doctrine of 'workers' control' for industries brought under public ownership by a Labour government had been abandoned by the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress before the war,<sup>85</sup> there remained a widespread belief in the party and the unions that public ownership would bring a 'new deal' for workers in nationalized industries as well as improved services for their customers; and that part of the new deal would go beyond improved pay and conditions to include a greater say for workers in how the industry was to be run. However, these two objects, better service and a greater say for the workers in the running of the nationalized industries, were not necessarily compatible. As a thoughtful American observer of the nationalized coal industry put it:

For nearly a generation coal nationalisation had held the twin objectives of technical reorganisation and an extension of industrial democracy. In the short run, these goals were irreconcilable, for the first required the retention of the managerial personnel who had run the industry in the 'bad old days' while the second seemed to require that they be replaced by new technicians who would operate within some context of 'workers' control' . . .

<sup>85</sup> See Ch. 2.



It proved equally impossible to find men who knew anything about finance, marketing and the law except among men who had spent their lives in such work, something very few socialists or union officers had done.<sup>86</sup>

On the other hand the Coal Board's 'Labor Department . . . was staffed almost exclusively by men who had been officials of the N.U.M.'<sup>87</sup> Many of the labour officers in the department had joined the staff of the Ministry of Fuel and Power, which was set up in 1942, as labour officers, or as investigation officers to deal with absenteeism. Unless they were found jobs with the Coal Board, they would have had to go back to union jobs or to the pits. Most of them had 'adjusted fairly well to their jobs' and there was 'less friction' with production officials than might have been expected, but there was 'a fairly widespread feeling in the miners' union, and even among some of the labor officers themselves, that they are not playing as influential a role in the Board's affairs as they and the union originally hoped'.<sup>88</sup>

Although syndicalist ideas had at one time had a considerable hold among the miners,<sup>89</sup> especially in South Wales, their national union had accepted the arguments of the Trades Union Congress's report on 'Post-war Reconstruction' in 1944 that, in a nationalized industry, 'It is essential that responsibility to the public shall be maintained by the appointment of the members of its governing body by a Minister responsible to Parliament, and they should therefore be selected on the basis of their competence and ability to administer the industry efficiently in the public interest.'<sup>90</sup> Any notion of 'workers' control' or 'joint control' was therefore ruled out. However, there was evidence of discontent among the miners with the organisation of their industry.

At every annual conference of the N.U.M. since nationalisation there has been at least one resolution censuring the Coal Board's organisation, and in 1949 there were more resolutions on this topic than on any other. That year the conference directed the National Executive Committee to establish a special committee to investigate N[atational] C[oyal] B[oard] administration.<sup>91</sup>

There were, however, two major unions that dissented from the findings of the 1944 report concerning 'workers' control'. They were the Railwaymen and the Post Office Workers. Like the South Wales Miners, the Railwaymen had a strong syndicalist tradition,<sup>92</sup> and it was 'the official policy of the union that nationalisation meant substantial representation of the workers on the board of management'.<sup>93</sup> However,

<sup>86</sup> G. B. Baldwin, *The Labor Problems of British Coal* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 26.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>89</sup> For the influence of syndicalism among the South Wales miners, see Clegg, *History*, ii. 106, 193, 359.

<sup>90</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), 400.

<sup>91</sup> Baldwin, 25.

<sup>92</sup> Bagwell, 326-7.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 623.

during the period of the preparation and passage of the Transport Nationalization Bill this view was not pressed by the union's general secretary, John Benstead, or by its executive committee. After the bill was passed, Benstead was appointed by the Minister of Transport to be a member of the Transport Commission, and Jim Figgins, a confirmed supporter of the union's traditional commitment to workers' control, was elected general secretary. At the meeting of the Trades Union Congress in September 1948 he introduced a resolution expressing 'concern . . . at the present composition of the Boards of nationalised industries and . . . the necessity for greater workers' participation, which can only be obtained from Trade Union ranks'.<sup>94</sup> The Mineworkers gave further evidence of their worries about the management of the nationalized coal industry by seconding the resolution; and the General Council showed its appreciation of the mood of Congress, if not its own firmness of mind, by accepting the resolution. At their annual conference in 1949 the Railwaymen resolved by 72 votes to 2 that there should be '50 per cent workers' representation at all levels' of management.<sup>95</sup>

If the Miners and the Railwaymen had been strongly influenced by syndicalist ideas, the inspiration of the Post Office Workers had come from the doctrines of guild socialism propounded by G. D. H. Cole and his colleagues.<sup>96</sup> At Congress in 1947 their spokesman called on 'the Government to set up Joint Administrative Boards for Socialised Industries, on which trade union representatives elected by and responsible to their membership, shall sit in equal status with the management'.<sup>97</sup> The delegates agreed that this resolution should be referred to the General Council, which passed it on to its Economic Committee, along with a resolution from the Draughtsmen seeking 'the fullest participation by all sections of the workers, through their trade unions, in the direction and management of nationalised industries'.<sup>98</sup>

The committee gave its consideration to the two resolutions throughout the following year, 'along with the published information on the administrative arrangements of the nationalised industries, of the provisions for trade union participation and of membership of the national and regional boards of the nationalised industries'. Its main conclusion, not surprisingly, was that

only in the light of experience would it be possible to say whether adjustments would be needed in the arrangements obtaining in the nationalised industries and the provisions for workpeople to participate in management . . . Moreover, it was inevitable in the early days of nationalisation certain mistakes would be

<sup>94</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1948), 371.

<sup>96</sup> For guild socialism, see Clegg, *History*, ii. 361-2.

<sup>97</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1947), 591.

<sup>95</sup> Bagwell, 625.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 472.

made, and although every effort had been made to learn from these mistakes, their significance should not be exaggerated.

It did, however, recall suggestions it had already made in its 'Interim Report on Post-War Reconstruction' that trade union appointments to nationalized industry boards should be full-time and should be drawn from nominations submitted to the responsible minister by the General Council.<sup>99</sup> It also drew attention to the need 'to obtain as much authoritative information as possible on the way in which in practice the nationalised industries were being administered', and in this context mentioned the examination of the National Coal Board which the Mineworkers were proposing to undertake, saying it had already asked the union for a copy of the report, when available.

In dealing with the resolution from the Post Office Workers, the committee had a discussion with representatives of the union, as a result of which it was not wholly dismissive. The union told it that consultative arrangements 'did not constitute effective participation in management', but 'produced a sense of frustration because the workers had no real opportunity for exercising responsibility'. It 'did not accept the difficulties of dual representation which the TUC foresaw' in the direct representation of unions on the boards of nationalized industries. As a result the committee was prepared to accept that it must take account of the union's long experience of the Post Office by admitting that the 'Post Office might be different from other nationalised industries'; and that it should give closer consideration to its organizational problems, although 'there was no reason to modify Congress policy regarding the form of workers' participation in the management of nationalised industries generally'.<sup>100</sup> This conclusion did not commend itself to the Railwaymen, who continued to press for something more than consultation.

The impact of nationalization on the pay of the workers in the nationalized industries was far from uniform. During the years of coal shortages through the war and after, the pay of coalminers had risen to the top of the earnings league, where it remained. In the summer of 1947, a few months before nationalization, a court of inquiry had awarded an increase of 37½p a week to manual workers on the railways, along with a forty-four-hour week.<sup>101</sup> The earnings of railwaymen were determined almost entirely by national negotiations, and those of miners largely by area agreements and settlements in the pits. In the electricity-supply industry, where nationalization took effect on 1 April 1948, national negotiations were the general rule. In the opinion of the Electricians' president, Foulkes, nationalization had made no change 'in

<sup>99</sup> See Ch. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1948), 235-9.

<sup>101</sup> See above.

the status of the worker in the industry', and so 'the primary function of the trade unions will continue to be that of collective bargaining to safeguard and improve the workers' standard of living'.<sup>102</sup> A year later he was able to report

a list of eighteen 'major improvements' in workers' conditions ... the changeover to the BEA and its fifteen area boards, rather than 541 different undertakings had 'a great and beneficial significance' for the workers in the industry. Some of the eighteen benefits were fairly small beer—like the ex gratia payment of an extra shift for shift-workers working at Christmas in 1948. But the cumulative list of improvements in pay for shifts and special duties, coupled to a series of significant general advances in sick pay, payments for meetings, works committees, the guaranteed week, the abolition of lower-paid zones, lodging allowances, the absorption of Central Electricity Board men into the system—all meant real progress for the workers concerned.<sup>103</sup>

The major union in the gas industry, the General and Municipal Workers, was not as wedded to centralization as the Electricians. With its strongly regionalized organization, the union set its face against the complete centralization of collective bargaining. However, there was a problem. The assets of the industry had been vested in the area gas boards whose chairmen composed the new British Gas Council, along with the chairman and deputy chairman of the council, which was thus a federal body. Among the limited functions of the council was the establishment of machinery for settling pay and conditions of employment with the unions, to which end it set up area joint councils. However, the boundaries of these area councils were very different from those of the former regional joint councils which had settled rates of pay in the industry up to now, so that the new areas included workers doing the same job but paid at different rates. As a stopgap measure, it was agreed that no worker should suffer a cut in pay as a consequence, while a new system was worked out. In the summer of 1950 it was announced that the national joint council would settle three 'labourers' rates', one for the London area, and two for the rest of the country. The area joint councils other than London were to allocate the undertakings within their boundaries to one or other of these rates, and to settle the additional rates to be paid to all other grades. A worker whose existing pay exceeded the rate allotted to his grade—and there were not many of these—was to keep that rate of pay until it was overtaken by subsequent wage increases.<sup>104</sup> As an example of the advantages of this system, the union could quote the pay of gasfitters in the Southern area, where the rates for most workers were somewhat below those in other, more urban, areas. As a result of the construction of oil refineries in the region

<sup>102</sup> Lloyd, 313.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* 314.

<sup>104</sup> Clegg, *General Union*, 167-70.



there was a strong demand for pipe-fitters, a job for which gasfitters are qualified, and the Southern Area Joint Council was able to fix a relatively high rate for them to avoid undue loss of labour.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to the agreements that were signed on terms of employment, the managements of the nationalized industries entered into further agreements with the unions for other matters concerning both sides to be considered by consultative committees empowered to give advice to management. Since these agreements were accepted and signed by the representatives of the boards themselves, they were more likely to be generally observed by local managers than similar agreements signed by employers' associations in private industry. It could thus be said that the provisions for dealing with industrial-relations matters, and even perhaps the terms of employment in the nationalized industries, were generally superior to those in the private sector; but what could not be said was that industrial relations in nationalized industry were everywhere and necessarily ahead of the private sector. There was no achievement in collective bargaining or joint consultation in the nationalized industries that could not be equalled or even bettered in some private industry; and therefore what the propagandists of socialism had led their listeners and readers to believe in the past was not supported by British experience so far.

A coalmining dispute at the Grimethorpe Colliery in Yorkshire in the summer of 1947 attracted considerable attention, and was widely quoted as demonstrating that coal-nationalization had not improved industrial relations. The five-day-week agreement in the industry had made provision for the maintenance of output by redistributing the men's work-loads over five shifts instead of five and a half shifts. At one seam in this colliery the proposal was for a two-foot increase in the length of the 'stint'. The 200 faceworkers concerned refused to accept the increase, saying that 'it would mean that older workers would have to work harder or be forced to retire from face work'.<sup>106</sup> The whole pit stopped work. Ten days later a nearby pit stopped in sympathy. The divisional chairman announced that the strikers would be considered to have broken their contracts. By 28 August ten pits were on strike.

Trade union leaders were gathering at Southport for the annual meeting of the Trades Union Congress. Arthur Horner was dispatched thence to Grimethorpe, along with one of the Yorkshire Miners' officials, to get the men back to work. It was a wise choice. Horner's reputation as a trade union militant had been established over a long period. It may have been a little tarnished by his acceptance of a

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> B. J. McCormick, *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 180.

government proposal that he be seconded by the union to serve as national coal production officer to boost output after the war, but his subsequent refusal to accept a seat on the National Coal Board would have had the opposite effect. When the union's secretary, Ebby Edwards, accepted in his stead, Horner was elected to succeed Edwards, confirming his popularity among the miners, who would not have thought any the worse of him when the union's executive decided not to nominate him for the seat on the General Council of Congress which Edwards had vacated, but to put forward Jim Bowman of Northumberland instead.

A meeting was held in the miners' hall at Grimethorpe. The Yorkshire official who accompanied Horner was shouted down, but, reported Horner in his autobiography, he himself 'got a reasonable hearing'. However, he continued, the lodge secretary, 'who had agreed with me on a return to work . . . used the phrase "Sign on". At this somebody in the audience shouted, "So we have been sacked". That ended any hope of getting back to work that day'.<sup>107</sup> By 2 September the number of pits on strike had risen to forty-six, and the next day, a third of all Yorkshire pits were out. A return to work was eventually arranged, pending the report of a fact-finding committee, and was followed by pit-bargaining 'on wages and working conditions which was to cause a gap to open between the wages of piece-workers and time-workers'.<sup>108</sup>

The Labour government intended to improve the performance of industries that remained in private hands as well as that of nationalized industries, and to encourage a greater degree of participation in managerial decisions by workers' representatives in private industry than had been common before the war, but its plans for this had not been worked out before it took office as its plans for nationalization had been. However, it had no doubts that something had to be done to equip and reorganize many private industries to meet the demands that the post-war world would make on them. It therefore proceeded by establishing 'working parties' consisting of an equal number of trade union and employer representatives, along with independent members, including the chairman, whose terms of reference were, in each instance,

to examine and inquire into the various schemes and suggestions put forward for improvements in organisation, production and distribution methods and processes in the industry, and report as to the steps which should be taken in the national interest to strengthen the industry and render it more capable of meeting competition in the home and foreign markets.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Arthur Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1960), 197.

<sup>108</sup> McCormick, 180.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted by P. D. Henderson, 'Britain's International Position', in G. D. N. Worswick and P. H. Ady (eds.), *The British Economy 1945-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 455.

Working parties were not set up in every industry that had not been included in the nationalization programme. Engineering and ship-building, for example, were not included, nor were agriculture, paper and printing, chemicals, or any part of the financial sector. All the industries in which working parties were set up were '(with the exceptions of jute and china clay) mainly concerned with the manufacture of consumers' goods, and were also alike in containing a large number of firms, in most cases of very varying size and character'.<sup>110</sup>

In one of the industries, cotton, a board had been established in 1940 with representative and independent members by the Cotton Industry Act 1940 to collect information, to stimulate research and exports, and to represent the industry. When Cripps drew up the Industrial Organization and Development Bill on the basis of the working-party reports, he took the Cotton Board as his model; and, after the bill became law in 1947, the Cotton Board was reconstituted the following year as a development council under its provisions.

The councils were given a considerable list of functions including design and research, standardization, improving marketing and distribution, recruitment and training, the collection of statistics, and advising the relevant minister; but their powers were limited to the collection of statistics, the registration of the firms within their scope, and the imposition of a levy to cover their expenses. Their membership was to be on the same basis as that of the working parties. Councils were to be set up only where 'the establishment of a development council for the industry is desired by a substantial number of persons in the industry'.<sup>111</sup> The Act also allowed for orders to impose compulsory levies for research or for promoting exports to be made whether or not a development council was established. In fact the Act came too late to have much effect. If it had been in force at the end of the war, or even in 1946, a number of other development councils might have been established, but opposition among employers to government intervention in the affairs of their businesses grew apace from 1947 onwards. In addition to the Cotton Board, councils were set up only in furniture, jewellery and silverware, and clothing; and compulsory research levies were imposed on wool and lace, with a second levy on wool for export promotion.

#### *The Cold War and the World Federation of Trade Unions*

Relations between Britain and the Soviet Union began to deteriorate almost as soon as the war was over, if not before, and it was not long

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 456.

also worsened. There were differences concerning Soviet support for the pro-Communist ELAS faction in the civil war in Greece, and over the Soviets' attempt to extend their influence in the Middle East and also into Africa. Differences between the Soviet Union and her Western allies held up the negotiation of peace treaties with Germany's European allies. Bevin was 'passionately anti-Communist'.<sup>112</sup> When Churchill in his Fulton speech in America in March 1946 spoke of an iron curtain dividing democratic western Europe from the Communist east, Bevin denied that the Labour government shared his opinion, but, 'in private [he] . . . viewed Churchill's speech . . . with grim satisfaction, and never disavowed its tone'.<sup>113</sup> Eventually these differences between the wartime allies led to a division of Germany and of Europe by an 'iron curtain' probably sharper than even Churchill had envisaged.

The division was ultimately mirrored in the world's trade union movements, but in this environment it took longer to emerge. The proposal for the formation of an Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee had been put forward and approved at the meeting of Congress in 1941. The Soviets agreed, and the first meeting of the committee was held in Moscow in October 1941, when there was 'complete agreement' on the objectives of the new body, most of which concerned the contributions they could make to the Allies' war efforts.<sup>114</sup> The council met again in 1943 and 1944, alternating between London and Moscow. It tried to extend its membership to include the unions in the United States, in particular the main union bodies there, the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations,<sup>115</sup> and the separate Railway Brotherhoods. When the General Council approached the American Federation of Labor, it was told that the Congress of Industrial Organizations should not be included because they regarded it as a 'breakaway organisation', and that the Railway Brotherhoods accounted for only a minority of American railway trade-unionists with the great majority of them in unions affiliated to the American Federation of Labor. Accordingly the federation rejected the British proposals. When the General Council took the matter up with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the latter suggested that 'they thought that the TUC should get all the organised labour bodies of America together and deal with them on equal terms. When questioned on the matter they did not, however, make any suggestions as to how this could be done.'<sup>116</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Morgan, 235.

<sup>114</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1942), 58-9.

<sup>115</sup> For the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organisations, see above.

<sup>116</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1943), 81-5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 245.



Meanwhile an Emergency Council of the International Federation of Trade Unions, formed in July 1942 to keep the federation in being, had decided that there should be a new 'International Federation of a world-wide character' which should include not only the national federations of trade unions in each country, but also the international trade secretariats to which the unions in different countries were affiliated industry by industry.<sup>117</sup> Citrine told Congress in 1944 that the General Council and the Soviets had agreed that a 'preparatory committee' should be appointed for the World Trade Union Conference which, it was hoped, would inaugurate the new body, and that this committee 'should be as broadly based as possible, and should include all American representation available'.<sup>118</sup> The World Trade Union Conference met in London from 6 to 17 February 1945, with delegates from the Congress of Industrial Organizations but not from the American Federation of Labor. After considerable difficulty over the position of the 'trade departments', as the trade secretariats were now to be called, a draft constitution of the new organization was agreed, and a further conference was held in Paris in September, at which the draft was accepted 'with minor alterations'.<sup>119</sup> Over the following two years the new body's Executive Bureau, Executive Committee, and General Council went into operation. For example, they sent commissions to Germany, Austria, and Japan in connection with the revival of trade union movements in those countries, and submitted draft resolutions on trade union rights to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. They also drew up regulations for the operation of trade departments, which were submitted to the national trade union centres for ratification.

Subsequently, in their account of how their organizations and other non-Communist trade union centres came to withdraw from the World Federation, the British, American, and Dutch members of the executive bureau reported that:

Agreement was reached in the early stages on the principle of full autonomy for the I[n]ternational T[rade] S[ecretariat]s in their special trade activities within the WFTU. In attempting to work out the precise regulations which would apply, the organisations vitally concerned with this matter found themselves faced with endless negotiations, protracted over a period of three years. During this period, the various concessions made by the WFTU fell short of the original understanding. This breach of faith undermined the confidence of the I.T.S.s in the WFTU.

It must be said that responsibility for the delay which has occurred, lying as it does at the door of the Soviet trade unions, confirms other evidence that they were not so much concerned in the establishment and operation of the World

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 92.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 135.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* (1946), 133.

Federation as a trade union international as they were with its political potentialities.

The I.T.S.s were convinced that the Communist leaders in reality wanted to paralyse their activities.

The position of the I.T.S.s was serious, but another, even more basic factor has to be stressed. In order to maintain the WFTU as an effective organisation, composed as it was of national trade union movements so different in ideology, origin and traditions, it was essential that it be based on good faith in individual trade union relationships, sincerity in expressions of fraternity, and mutual respect for the various conceptions.

In the light of three years' experience, we have the right to ask whether these moral conditions have ever existed.<sup>120</sup>

In the end, the secession of the non-Communist trade union movements from the World Federation of Trade Unions followed the inauguration of the Marshall Plan. The Communists delayed taking a decision on the plan until the non-Communist trade union movements decided that they must go ahead with the plan without a decision from the World Federation. At the beginning of 1949 the General Council of Congress proposed that the activities of the World Federation be suspended in the hope that they might be resumed by agreement subsequently. The executive bureau rejected the proposal in January 1949, with the representatives of Soviet Union, Italy, and China voting against, along with Saillant, the secretary, from France; and the representatives of Holland and the American Congress of Industrial Organizations voting for the proposal, along with the president, Deakin, who had taken over from Citrine in 1946. Deakin then closed the meeting, and the three non-Communists walked out.<sup>121</sup>

Preparations for the formation of a new international trade union federation were put in hand soon afterwards. The General Council undertook to act as convener of an international conference which was held in Geneva in June 1949. The conference set up a preparatory committee to draft a constitution for the new federation, and to convene an inaugural conference.

### *Wage Policy*

The General Council made no attempt to extend its co-ordination of claims submitted by the unions to employers beyond hours of work and

<sup>120</sup> 'Free Trade Unions leave the WFTU, Statement by representatives of the British Trades Union Congress, the Congress of Industrial Organisations, U.S.A., and the Confederation of free Trade Unions of the Netherlands, who took part in the meeting of the Executive Bureau of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Paris, January 17-19, 1949' (Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1949), 524-42).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 541.

holidays with pay. Indeed, it does not seem to have given any serious consideration to the conduct and outcome of pay-bargaining after the war except that, by the beginning of 1946, it accepted that all collective bargaining should continue to be conducted under the restraint of Order 1305, and it hoped that the Labour government would continue the policy of holding the cost-of-living stable by means of subsidies. On 7 June 1944 the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Anderson, had referred to the need to 'have regard to the changing levels of wages, costs and prices, and . . . from time to time [to] review the precise level at which . . . stabilisation is to be continued in the light of current conditions'. The statement had provoked the General Council to send a deputation to tell him that it was 'deeply concerned about the possible repercussions if the index were permitted to rise'.<sup>122</sup>

In the first half of 1945 wage settlements for men ranged between 20p a week in flourmilling and 35p a week in the cotton industry. In March men's rates in agriculture had been raised by 25p a week, and in April the engineering unions settled for an increase of 22½p for men, but only 7½p for women. After the end of the war there was a series of settlements at substantially higher figures, which may well have indicated a revulsion of feeling among higher-paid workers against wartime egalitarianism. The outstanding example was the dockers;<sup>123</sup> but male electrical-contracting employees received 45p a week in two stages, in October and December. On the other hand, coalminers, whose four-year agreement of April 1944 still had more than two years to run, received no increase; and steelworkers had to be content with 5p a week from their cost-of-living sliding scale. In 1945, according to the Ministry of Labour, the number of wage-earners who received negotiated increases in their rates of pay was 7.31 million, and the total weekly increase amounted to £1.8 million a year; but the economic impact of these changes was modified by the fall-off in armaments production and a reduction in overtime working, which cut back weekly earnings. The peak figure for wartime weekly earnings for men was £6.18 in January 1944. The figure for January 1945 was £5.97, and by January 1946 it was down to £5.70. The wartime peak was exceeded only in October 1947, when average male weekly earnings were returned as £6.40.<sup>124</sup> The fall in earnings in 1945 and 1946 reduced the inflationary pressure of pay increases.

One reason for the recovery of average earnings figures by 1947 was that 1946 had been the peak post-war year for pay increases prior to 1951. The number of wage-earners affected, at 7.98 million, was a little

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* (1944), 193-4.

<sup>123</sup> See above.

<sup>124</sup> *British Labour Statistics, Historical Abstract, 1886-1968*, table 41F.

higher than in 1945, but the total weekly amount, at £2.9 million, was up by half as much again. Coalminers were still held back by their 1944 agreement, but steelworkers had renegotiated their cost-of-living sliding scale to yield another 5½ to 7p a shift. For the rest, there were no general pay increases for railwaymen, the merchant navy, and the dockers; but wage-earners in virtually every other industry secured increases. The highest figure, not for the first time, was in the printing industry. In the provinces it conceded advances in January and again in November, totalling 82½p to 92½p a week. Fewer manual workers secured pay increases in 1947, when the total was just short of 5 million; and the total amount, at £1.7 million, was substantially below the 1946 figure. Since 1947 was the year in which more than half of the massive post-war reduction in hours of work was concentrated, the total increase in wage costs in Britain in that year was well above that in 1946.<sup>125</sup>

During the summer of 1946 the government decided to share its worries about the state of the British economy with the unions and the employers. The National Joint Advisory Council had not met since February 1941, its place having been taken in the mean time by the smaller Joint Consultative Committee; but it was called together again on 31 July to hear Morrison explain that it was being recalled to 'provide an opportunity for an overall appreciation of the economic situation more especially in relation to the fundamental problem of manpower'. Dalton then told the council that the price level was

out of line with costs, thereby throwing an increased burden on the Exchequer. This was due in no small part to the fact that though the cost of living had been stabilised, wage costs continued to rise. . . . The result was a serious gap between internal prices and costs which could be made up only by increasing efficiency, and the Chancellor appealed for the co-operation of industry in keeping wages stable, just as the Government were keeping prices stable.

At the next meeting of the council on 30 October the government was asked 'to make available to the country generally a full statement of all the economic considerations affecting the relations between employers and Trade Unions'. A draft was prepared and sent to the two sides for comment. On 8 January 1947 the General Council members<sup>126</sup> were informed that the Ministry of Labour had been told that the draft 'placed undue emphasis on wages as a production cost' and that 'figures regarding profits should also be included'. They decided that the redraft now before them still failed to meet these criticisms, and was therefore also unacceptable. Later that day both sides of the council indicated the

<sup>125</sup> Figures taken from the annual summaries of wage increases published in the Jan. issues of the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*.

<sup>126</sup> The minutes of the meeting of the General Council side are included with the minutes of the National Joint Advisory Council in the Trades Union Congress records.



further changes they wanted. Even so, the General Council members gave their approval to the next draft which they saw on 15 January only 'on the clear understanding that Unions would continue to be free to submit wages applications as formerly, where this was found to be necessary'.

As was to be expected in these circumstances, the final version,<sup>127</sup> published later that month, was not an incisive document. It emphasized the high cost of subsidies to stabilize prices, mainly of food, and the need 'to steady the cost of production, to man up essential industries, and above all, to step up production, until we have struck a balance between total demand and total supply'. On 22 January Hallsworth told the General Council that 'it had been intimated to the Minister of Labour that Unions would be free to make wages applications as formerly and to negotiate such claims'.

In the circumstances the government was wise not to send drafts of its *Economic Survey for 1947* to the General Council and the British Employers' Confederation before publication. However, by the time it came out, the plans that it set out had been upset by the fuel crisis which struck the country in January 1947. The general shortage of coal was gravely aggravated by extremely cold weather which brought transport by road and rail to a halt in many parts of the country. By early February the situation was so serious that Shinwell had to announce that much of industry would have to shut down, and that electricity supplies to domestic consumers would have to be cut off for most of the day. Unemployment rose to 2 million. On 26 February the General Council established a Special Committee on the Economic Situation 'to review the fuel crisis and the whole position as set out in the Government's White Paper "Economic Survey", and to consider constructive proposals for remedying the situation the following winter'. The members of the new committee were an impressive list of the Council's heavyweights. The General Council therefore reacted more quickly than did the government to the obvious need to ensure that the country's economic recovery was not knocked off course again. The government took its time over the construction of its new economic-planning machinery, which was completed by the appointment of Cripps as Minister of Economic Affairs only in September, by which time the economy had received an even more severe blow than that of the fuel crisis from the massive drain of Britain's dollar reserves following convertibility, and leading too late to its suspension.<sup>128</sup>

However, a new means of supplying economic assistance from the United States to Britain—along with other European countries—was

<sup>127</sup> Cmd. 7018 (1947).

<sup>128</sup> See pp. 355–6.

already being devised on the basis of a speech at Harvard on 5 June 1947 by General Marshall, now United States Secretary of State, about the need for American assistance to Europe, which he said 'must not be on a piecemeal basis as crises develop' but based on a plan, the 'initiative' for which 'must come from Europe'. Bevin 'grasped the need to produce a report which would fire the imagination of the American people and Congress'.<sup>129</sup> He wanted Britain to be a partner in the scheme as well as a recipient of aid, and with assurances from Washington that this dual status was acceptable, he went to Paris for talks with Bidault and Molotov, his counterparts in the French and Soviet governments. A conference was arranged for 12 July in Paris. Twenty-two European countries were invited, but the Soviets decided not to participate, and the other Communist governments in eastern Europe were constrained to stay away as well. Fourteen countries attended. Germany was absent, although it was evident that successful European economic recovery would depend heavily on the use of German resources. The conference set up a committee which became the Organization for European Economic Co-operation.

The significance of the conference was not fully appreciated by the delegates to the 1947 Trades Union Congress in September. The General Council's report included a full account of its actions in response to the fuel crisis and its reactions to the *Economic Survey* for 1947, and set out a number of proposals for ensuring that the country was better prepared for coping with another such winter, if it should occur.<sup>130</sup> The report also recommended 'joint consideration . . . in all industries and services to the desirability and practicability of introducing or extending suitable systems of payment which provide the maximum increased output', and the 'resuscitation of Joint Production Committees'. The Council also wanted to see the employment of women facilitated by arranging 'half-shifts' and further provision of day nurseries.<sup>131</sup> The Council added two supplementary documents to its report as appendices. The first concerned coalmining, saying that

the present economic crisis is so grave that we cannot wait for the full benefits that will accrue from nationalisation . . . to increase the output of the mines . . . We look to the National Coal Board to give effect with all possible speed to the plans which are necessary to develop the industry . . . In the meantime . . . we must in the national interest appeal to all those engaged in the industry now to increase the output of coal in order that the target for the industry shall be met, and if possible exceeded . . .

It is the desire of the Trade Union and Labour Movement to do justice to the

<sup>129</sup> Bullock, iii. 406-7.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 247-9.

<sup>130</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1947), 231-4.

mineworkers' claim that their industry should be treated as a national service and that the contribution the vast majority of them are making to the national well-being should be honoured.<sup>132</sup>

The second supplementary report brought the Council's report up to date by giving an account of the suspension of sterling convertibility on 20 August: of a series of meetings with ministers, of the National Joint Advisory Council, and of the General Council itself, and of the statements, resolutions, and decisions that emerged from them.

The government had made three proposals: to 'get more people into the industries producing our more essential export and domestic requirements' by reimposing the wartime Control of Engagement Order to divert labour away from less essential industries; that the General Council should agree to government approaches to negotiating bodies to arrange extensions of the working week in order to increase production; and that, 'while rejecting the doctrine that wages should be settled by the government, the . . . Minister of Labour should establish a branch to collect and collate information on wages and hours . . . to inform Ministers more accurately and extensively than hitherto on the movements of wages and their possible economic consequences'.<sup>133</sup> These proposals were accepted at meetings of the General Council and the National Joint Advisory Council on 6 August; but the actions of the General Council were not agreed by Congress without challenge when they came before it on the first day of its annual meeting on 1 September. Will Arthur of the South Wales Miners criticized its statement on coalmining. The Coal Board was advertising the high earnings that could be had in the industry in order to attract recruits, but such earnings, he said, were confined to face-workers, and not available to new entrants. 'The man who comes to the coalfield will get [£4.50] on the surface and £5 underground. There are thousands of skilled men who are performing unskilled work at the moment because there is not sufficient faceroom to absorb them.' He asserted that 90 per cent of coalminers 'are now working to their fullest capacity'. If there was a small minority not doing so, that was true of every other industry. 'The men have been downtrodden and oppressed and are still working under the worst conditions it is possible to imagine. They cannot be asked to continue to make an extra effort unless they are placed on at least a higher standard than they have known in the war years.'<sup>134</sup>

The next day a spokesman of the Constructional Engineers proposed the reference back of the General Council's report on 'Developments in the Economic Situation'

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, app. C, 'A Review of the Economic Situation', 565-74.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 339-40.

because it does not go far enough in relation to the present crisis . . . You will find that inside your trade union branches, inside your Labour Party rooms, there is a certain bewilderment, there is a lack of idea as to the road and direction in which we are going. There is, in fact a certain amount of demoralisation in the working-class movement at this moment.<sup>135</sup>

The proposal was seconded by the future Prime Minister, James Callaghan MP, of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, but it was declared lost on a show of hands, without need for a card vote. On the proposal for the 'resuscitation of Joint Production Committees', the General Council's report asserted that

there was no alternative except the creation of an atmosphere of mutual confidence throughout the workshops and factories of the country. They felt that there was a limit to the amount of exhortation that could take place from above, whether by the Government or the T.U.C. and that the most fruitful place to engender confidence was at the place of production . . .

The General Council also . . . felt that the best possible means of securing this atmosphere of confidence was a genuine effort to establish Joint Production Committees. They recognised that these had largely fallen into disuse since the end of the war period but felt that in view of the vital necessity for increased production and the elimination of waste of all description . . . there was no alternative but their resuscitation.<sup>136</sup>

This proposal was approved by the National Joint Advisory Council, so long as the committees were purely advisory and did not deal with issues subject to negotiation, and provided that each industry was able to decide the constitution of the committees and the level at which they should be established. The General Council also circulated all its affiliated unions to exhort them to set up joint production committees 'without delay'.<sup>137</sup>

On the agenda of Congress the Engineers, along with two other engineering unions, had submitted a resolution asking the government 'at the earliest possible moment' to introduce legislation to make 'Joint Production Committees representative of manual, non-manual, and technical workers a statutory obligation upon industry'.<sup>138</sup> In moving it, Tanner referred to 'the very big change which took place in the engineering industry' when such committees had been set up during the war. Since then, however, despite the joint advisory bodies which had been established at national and industry level, the employers had 'clearly indicated their opposition to any proposal for a wider and more active participation in the practical running of industry'. They had not responded to the requests of the unions or the appeals of the

<sup>135</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1947), 367-8.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 239.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*



government for joint production committees to be set up or re-constituted.<sup>139</sup> The resolution was, however, not put to the vote, but 'remitted to the General Council', on the grounds that legislation on these lines might lead to joint production committees being 'set up in non-union establishments . . . as a substitute for trade unionism', as Hallsworth put it on behalf of the General Council.<sup>140</sup>

The General Council's initiative led to much activity. The government invited all national negotiating bodies to conclude agreements on setting up joint production committees in their factories and workshops; and the regional boards for industry and the local employment committees were asked to encourage their formation. The report of the General Council to Congress in 1948 noted that twenty-three industries had negotiated agreements on the formation of such committees (presumably including those industries, such as engineering, that had already negotiated agreements on setting them up some years earlier), and that 'a further 15 industries have the matter under active consideration'. Moreover, to assist in stimulating joint production committees, the Minister of Labour had appointed 'Mr Lloyd Roberts, late Chief Labour Officer of ICI . . . to the headquarters staff of the Ministry'.<sup>141</sup> The following year the General Council was able to report agreements for 'the establishment of J.P.C.s or similar bodies' in thirty industries in addition to 'socialised industries'. These industries employed 5 million workers.<sup>142</sup> However, the committees that were set up at this time did not generally recapture the enthusiasm and impetus of their wartime predecessors.

Other steps were also taken with the intention of increasing output. On 29 October 1947 the Miners and the National Coal Board signed an agreement, initially to run for three months, to suspend the five-day-week agreement only six months after it was signed, in order to allow divisional coal boards to make arrangements with the union's area committees to work either an extra half-hour a day or a Saturday morning shift, so as to ease the fuel shortage. In addition, despite the fact that the current four-year pay agreement still had some months to run, the Miners and the board signed a new agreement on 18 December 1947 to increase the pay of underground miners by 75p a week and of surface workers by 50p a week, making their minimum rates £5.75 and £5 respectively. Had the government then been contemplating introducing some form of limitation of pay increases in 1948, such as it did in fact introduce, it would have been wise to arrange that the miners first receive a pay increase, in view both of the three years and more that had

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 437.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* (1948), 225-6.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* (1949), 195.

passed since their last pay increase, and of the critical importance of coal output to the economy.<sup>143</sup>

A more surprising development was an agreement that had been signed two months earlier in the building industry. In January 1947 the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives had submitted a claim to the building employers for an increase of 2½p an hour for craftsmen, and no less than 3¾p an hour for labourers—both well ahead of the level of settlements in other industries. The claim went to the National Arbitration Tribunal, which rejected it, saying that ‘any increase in wages must not precede definite evidence of a corresponding increase in output’.<sup>144</sup> When the unions resubmitted their claim to the employers soon afterwards, the latter told them that they were determined to introduce payment by results into the industry ‘at the earliest possible moment’. They designed a scheme which would give the members of their federation ‘wide discretion’ but was ‘directly related to output and designed to reduce costs’,<sup>145</sup> and sent it to the unions on 2 July. The unions consulted the Minister of Labour, who took the chair at an informal joint conference on 17 July, when he suggested that any scheme that was adopted should give workers paid by results ‘a reasonable expectation’ of earning 20 per cent above their time-rates, and that, to deal with ‘non-bonusable’ work, there should be an increase of 1¼p an hour to craftsmen in grade A areas, with proportionate increases for craftsmen in other areas, and 80 per cent of the craftsman’s increase for labourers. ‘The Employers pointed out that the suggestion was at variance with the economic policy of the Government as expounded in recent Ministerial speeches, but they promised to consider the suggestions.’<sup>146</sup> After consideration, the leaders of the employers’ federation recommended these terms to their members, but, before proceeding to negotiate with the unions, they asked the ministry whether in view of the Prime Minister’s statement on 6 August they ‘desired to alter the terms of the government’s suggestions’.<sup>147</sup> The Permanent Secretary replied that ‘the Minister trusted that both sides of the Industry would take the statement into account in their further negotiations’.<sup>148</sup> When it met the unions again, the latter ‘made it clear that the terms of this letter did not alter their attitude’ and as the ballot of union members had given a large majority for acceptance, agreement on the proposed terms was reached on 20

<sup>143</sup> Baldwin, 130-2.

<sup>144</sup> National Federation of Building Trade Employers, *Annual Report* (1947).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* On 6 Aug. 1947 Attlee had appealed to workers ‘not to press at this time for increased wages . . . to employers not to tempt workers away from essential work . . . to those in control of industry and commerce to refrain from declaring high dividends’ (HC Debs., col. 1508).

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

October. It included a standstill on pay increases in the industry until 1 February 1949.<sup>149</sup>

Acceptance by the unions was the result of the pooled votes of all the unions affiliated to the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives, but one major union, the Woodworkers, had voted against acceptance of payment by results, which they regarded as incompatible with their craft tradition of high-class workmanship, by two to one.<sup>150</sup> The vote was reported to the first annual conference that the union had held, in October 1947. The delegates decided to leave the final decision to a joint meeting of their general council and their executive council. During the war the union had been obliged to waive its rule against piece-work, because piece-work had been enforced on the industry by the Essential Work Order,<sup>151</sup> but that order had now lapsed. If it upheld its rule against piece-work now, its members would have to forgo the 1¼p an hour increase in pay on non-bonusable work (which was part of the agreement to introduce piece-work), give notice to withdraw from the operatives' federation and the National Joint Council for the Building Industry, but nevertheless accept payment by results for the period during which their notice was running out. It decided to suspend the rule against piece-work and to sign the new agreement.<sup>152</sup> Perhaps the government was wise to encourage agreement on the reintroduction of payment by results in the building industry now that the Essential Work Order had gone, before it took steps to introduce a curb on wage increases. In that way it could be more confident that its building programme would be fulfilled.

Another important decision concerning pay taken in 1947 was the introduction of a revised retail price index to replace the former cost-of-living index on which a large number of cost-of-living sliding-scale wage agreements were based, and which was frequently quoted in wage negotiations in other industries as well. The cost-of-living index had been based on the findings of a survey of working-class expenditure in 1913, which was a poor guide to patterns of spending in Britain after the Second World War. Its antiquity had allowed the government to offset increases in the prices of goods that now figured more prominently in consumption than they had done in 1913 by cutting the prices of goods that were now bought on a lesser scale than they had been in 1913. In this way it was able to keep the cost of living stable in spite of the need for employees to increase their incomes if they wished to avoid a reduction in their standard of living. The defects of the index were by

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> B. C. Roberts, *Trade Union Government and Administration in Great Britain* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science and G. Bell & Sons, 1956), 155.

<sup>151</sup> See Ch. 3.

<sup>152</sup> Connelly, 101-3.

now widely recognized, so, if the government wanted the public to give support to a policy of restraint, it was in its interest to introduce a new index in which the public could have confidence when judging the effects of the policy.

In 1946 the Minister of Labour had appointed a Cost of Living Advisory Committee, on which the General Council was represented by Hallsworth. A full survey of consumer spending would have taken a considerable time to set up and carry out, but such a survey had in fact been conducted in 1937-8, and was at least more relevant to current consumer behaviour than the old index. It was used to devise a new 'retail price index', to which the National Joint Advisory Council gave its approval. The General Council had wanted to delay its operation to allow time for 'the negotiations that would be necessary to secure adjustments of wages agreements' that relied on the old index, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that 'he would deplore any delay in making the change . . . So far he had kept the old index steady by means of subsidies, but these subsidies were not achieving the real purpose for which they were designed. He had always disliked the system of maintaining a stable Index by an unreal adjustment in prices.'<sup>153</sup> Perhaps he would not have been so keen to get rid of the old index if the way in which it had been manipulated by the government had not become so widely recognized.

With all these indications of the direction in which the minds of the members of the government were turning, it is not surprising that by the autumn of 1947 the General Council was expecting government action to limit pay increases. At its first meeting following Congress on 24 September, it decided that the Special Committee on the Economic Situation should not only remain in being, but should be strengthened by the addition of four more members. It went on to regret 'the unfortunate results' of a letter sent to several unions by the Minister of Labour suggesting that they reconsider applications for wage increases which they had submitted to wages councils—a piecemeal and unfairly selective form of wage policy. George Gibson proposed that the government 'should arrive at a decision on incomes policy'. Jim Bowman urged immediate action to deal with current wage problems in coalmining. This was before the opening of negotiations with the Coal Board which were to lead to a pay settlement in December.<sup>154</sup> He went on to complain that although the Miners had 'soft-pedalled' over wages, the Coal Board, without consulting his union, had given a substantial pay increase to colliery deputies, and as a result, fourteen pits in Scotland were on strike, 'insisting that the claims of the lower paid

<sup>153</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1947), 278.

<sup>154</sup> See p. 359.



sections should be pressed immediately'. Deakin wanted the council to express no opinion but to seek 'information relating to the Government's policy on the matter'.

The final decision was that the General Council's representatives should meet the Prime Minister and some of his Cabinet colleagues, but 'should confine themselves to the question of the interference by the Minister of Labour with the negotiating rights of trade unions'. Nevertheless, the issue of wage policy would not go away. At its next meeting, on 22 October, the Council had before it a letter from the Electrical Trades Union, proposing that a conference of trade union executives be called to discuss the subject. The Council did not agree to that, but 'the view was expressed that it was essential for the General Council to arrive at a decision on policy on subsidies, profits, prices, wages and related questions as soon as possible'. It asked for a document which was to be discussed a week later, on 29 October, but, when it met that day, it decided to refer the paper to the Special Committee on the Economic Situation with instructions to prepare a 'general policy'. The committee drafted an 'Interim Report on the Economic Situation', which was approved by the General Council on 17 December, and circulated to affiliated unions. The document urged the government to continue to hold prices stable by means of subsidies, and recommended that union executives

exercise even greater moderation and restraint than hitherto in the formulation and pursuit of claims for wage increases. . . . the General Council were giving consideration to the representations to be made to the Government on the means by which more extensive control of prices and profits could be developed for the purpose of maintaining future price stability.<sup>155</sup>

It was evident that the General Council was creeping, slowly and hesitantly, towards acceptance of a wage policy to be conducted jointly with the government. There is no doubt as to who was mainly responsible for the shift: Arthur Deakin. Deakin overshadowed his colleagues on the Council. There were several other members whose opinions carried weight, including Lawther and Bowman of the Miners' Federation, Evans of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, Geddes of the Post Office Workers, Chester of the Boot and Shoe Operatives, and Naesmith of the Weavers; but no other member of the Council could approach the authority exercised by Deakin, especially after Dukes retired in 1946. However, although Deakin had inherited Bevin's position in the union, and his status on the General Council, he was no Bevin. He equalled Bevin in courage, and came near to him in force of

<sup>155</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1948), 289.

character. He shared much the same values. But he lacked Bevin's genius—his intuitive grasp of situations and problems, and how they could be handled—and was, as a consequence, less sure of himself, moving more slowly than Bevin, and often more clumsily than Bevin would have moved in similar circumstances. However, as the forceful leader of Britain's largest union, his influence over his colleagues on the General Council was little less than Bevin's had been, if indeed he did not equal Bevin in this respect.

Deakin had made his earlier views on a government wage policy abundantly clear at the annual conference of the Labour Party in May 1947:

The question of incentives, the question of wages and conditions of employment are questions for the trade unions, and the sooner some of our people on the political side appreciate that and leave the job to the trade unions the better for the battle for production. There is no difference of opinion between the unions and the Government. . . . I do want to utter a word of warning [on] . . . the idea of an incomes policy. We will have none of that. Under no circumstances will we accept that the responsibility for the fixation of wages and the regulation of conditions of employment is one for the Government. If preferences are to be given, we are heading for trouble. The people that I represent are not going to play second fiddle. . . . Any attempt to alter the method of negotiation within industry would be fatal. You will not get the necessary production in the next six months if you destroy confidence in our negotiating machinery. . . . It would be disastrous, it would create chaos and conflict amongst the rank and file, and this would be destructive of the economy of the country, and of the effort so vitally necessary at this time.<sup>156</sup>

However, at the meeting of the General Council on 24 September when the Minister of Labour's attempt to persuade unions to reconsider claims that they had submitted to wages councils had been discussed, and Deakin had said that they should seek information on the government's views on wage policy,<sup>157</sup> he went on to say that 'he would be prepared to support a wages policy which related prices to real earnings. He was of the opinion that the General Council could guide a national conference and impress on the delegates the danger of creating an inflationary situation.'

In his study of Deakin as a trade union leader, V. L. Allen says that Deakin's change of mind about government wage policy had come about 'For reasons about which he himself was not clear'. He also points out that between the Labour Party conference in 1947 and the spring of 1948, Deakin changed his mind over the use of differentials as a remedy for labour shortages.<sup>158</sup> At the conference of trade union executives that

<sup>156</sup> Labour Party, *Report* (1947), 146.

<sup>157</sup> See above.

<sup>158</sup> Allen, 131.

discussed the government's proposals for a wage policy, he 'mounted the rostrum and announced that he had changed his mind and would accept a proposal to give preferential treatment to the mining industry'.<sup>159</sup> This change of mind was of critical importance. Allen has given us a revealing account of Deakin's methods of exercising control over the Transport and General Workers' Union. After he took over as general secretary, the meetings of the union executive 'became more concerned with receiving reports than with formulating lines of future action, and consequently had less say than they had in Bevin's day. . . . much of his power . . . was derived from his force of presentation, his determination to get his own way, and his ability to overawe his opponents'; although, until they were excluded in 1950, 'the formidable group of Communists' prevented him from being 'absolutely sure that he would carry his Executive with him on controversial matters'. 'When, at the union's delegate conference, he had National Trade Group Secretaries with him on the platform, he would deal with motions and questions relating to their special field of operation. . . . As well as being the chief, sometimes only, spokesman for the General Executive Council, he virtually controlled the Conference.' Moreover, he 'did not possess the faculty of handling individuals easily. He was clumsy, over-sensitive and, surprisingly, shy. His shyness was obscured by an assertiveness which sometimes became almost aggressive.'<sup>160</sup>

There is no comparable account of Deakin's behaviour in the General Council of Congress. Inevitably he would not have been able to treat his colleagues there as if they were officials of his own union, but a man who handled his own union officials so masterfully would expect to carry the Council with him, and his colleagues would all be aware of the number of votes at his disposal as general secretary of the largest constituent union should the issue under discussion be submitted to a vote at Congress. In contrast to the past, when Bevin's weight on the Council was balanced by Citrine, there was no other member of the Council at this time whose influence could match, or even approach, that of Deakin. Certainly that of Citrine's successor, Tewson, could not do so.

The government was of course aware of the change of heart that was in progress among the members of the General Council. It helped to give it courage in the early weeks of 1948 when it was drafting its *Statement on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices*, which Attlee read to the House of Commons on 4 February, and was then published as a White Paper.<sup>161</sup> The statement emphasized the need for Britain to avoid 'a dangerous inflationary situation'. This could be done provided there was 'no further increase in the level of personal incomes without at least a

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 250-6.

<sup>161</sup> Cmd. 7321 (1948).

corresponding increase in the volume of production'. However, it did not

follow that it would be right to stabilise all incomes as they stand today. There may well be cases in which increases in wages or salaries would be justified from a national point of view, for example where it is clear that only an increase in wages will attract the necessary labour. It does, however, follow that each claim for an increase in wages or salaries must be considered on its national merits and not on the basis of maintaining a former relativity between different occupations and industries.<sup>162</sup>

The statement said almost nothing about prices and profits, and there is no record of discussion between the government and the General Council or its committees over the drafting of the statement. The government was probably wise on both counts. Whatever it had said about prices and profits might have led to discussion, and if the General Council or its Special Committee on the Economic Situation had been shown a draft, it would inevitably have sought amendments and qualifications.

Where the government did make a mistake was in Cripps's handling of the London members of the General Council when he met them to discuss the statement. Apparently, 'he opened the meeting by explaining the purpose of the Paper, then pushed it across the table and departed before any discussion could take place'<sup>163</sup> However, amends were made on 11 February when the special committee met Attlee, Bevin, Cripps, Morrison, and Isaacs to discuss the statement; and on the following day when Cripps spoke in the House of Commons, emphasizing the need for price controls and the need for limiting dividends.<sup>164</sup>

The next relevant document on the files of the special committee is undated and entitled 'Statement on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices (Cmd. 7321): Recommendations of the Special Committee as Accepted by the General Council'. The main section of the text reads:

In the view of the Committee the principles of the White Paper relating to wage movements are acceptable to the Trade Union Movement to the extent that they:

- (a) recognise the necessity of retaining unimpaired the system of collective bargaining and free negotiations;
- (b) admit the justification for claims for increased wages where those claims are based on the fact of increased output;
- (c) admit the necessity of adjusting the wages of workers whose incomes are below a reasonable standard of subsistence;
- (d) affirm that it is in the national interest to establish standards of wages in under-manned industries in order to attract sufficient manpower; and

<sup>162</sup> Cmd. 7321 (1948).

<sup>163</sup> Allen, 127.

<sup>164</sup> HC Debs. (12 Feb. 1948), cols. 591-604.



- (e) recognise the need to safeguard those wage differentials which are an essential element in the wage structure of many important industries and are required to maintain standards of craftsmanship, training and experience that contribute directly to industrial efficiency and higher productivity.

As was commonly said by both trade-unionists and employers at the time, any trade union officer who could not justify almost any wage-claim under one or more of these grounds for exceptional treatment deserved to lose his job. However, what mattered was how they would be interpreted in practice.

The General Council approved the document at its meeting on 11 February 1948, but it did not pass unchallenged. 'In discussion certain members referred to the impossibility of a complete stabilisation of wages and to difficulties regarding the maintenance of differentials.' It is not easy to see what more the special committee could say to meet this objection beyond what it had already said in drawing up its grounds for exceptional treatment. However, the reference back of the whole document was moved, as might have been expected, by the Communist Papworth, although the reason he gave for doing so could not have been foreseen so readily. As the Communist Party still officially favoured a government pay policy, he told the meeting that he was acting 'with a view to the inclusion of a reference to the utilisation of manpower and the improvement of industrial efficiency'. He was seconded by Figgins, the Railwaymen's secretary, who employed a more traditional left-wing argument when he said that 'a reduction of the Armed Forces and the re-equipment of industry was an adequate alternative policy'. No one else supported Papworth, and the document was approved by the Council with two dissentients. Provided that it was also approved by a conference of the executive committees and councils of affiliated unions—the traditional method of consulting the movement between meetings of Congress—the Council undertook to review the situation after the budget.

The date of the conference of executives was fixed for 24 March. Meanwhile the Council's recommendations were drawn up for presentation to the conference. A summary of the White Paper was followed by the Council's five qualifications intended to make the proposal more congenial to trade-unionists. For good measure, the document then went on to say that 'The White Paper is not a law imposing rigid and specific restrictions upon wage claims and negotiations; it is a request to Trade Unions to restrict wage claims within the principles of the White Paper.' The Council did not propose that wage-claims already submitted should be withdrawn. Instead it advised unions to review them in the light of the White Paper and the Council's

interpretation of it; and asked them to endorse the White Paper at the conference, subject to government action to stabilize and reduce profits and prices. Finally it cut the proposed intervals between its prospective reviews of the working of the policy from six months to three.<sup>165</sup>

When these proposals were put to the union executives, they were approved by 5,421,000 votes to 2,032,000. The Miners and the two general unions were the largest constituent unions in the majority, and the Engineers the biggest in opposition. The April issue of the *Engineers' Monthly Journal* commented:

In common with practically all the Engineering and Shipbuilding Group, our own Union voted against the recommendations. . . . we cannot admit that the economic position of the operative engineer is comparable to his value to the nation, nor to the economic position of workers in a host of other industries where apprentices on low wage rates are not the general practice, and where the worker is not called upon to spend a good proportion of his wages on the provision of tools and working clothing.

If the statement that 'practically all' the engineering and shipbuilding unions voted against the General Council's recommendations at the conference of executives was correct, these unions could have accounted for most of the opposition there, for the total membership on which those unions had affiliated to Congress in 1947 (which would have been the figure used to weight the votes at the conference) came to 1,289,104.

A major reason for the reluctance of union members in these industries, and their leaders, to accept the General Council's proposals on pay policy was the state of their own wage negotiations. Except for adjustments to wage rates in order to maintain the former level of their weekly pay when the forty-four-hour working week was introduced, engineering and shipbuilding workers had received no general wage increase since April 1946. The agreement then reached with the engineering employers had set up a joint wage-structure committee to which the Engineers had submitted their proposals for a new engineering wage structure in August 1946. In February 1947 this joint committee had appointed a committee of experts in machine-shop practice to help them grade machines in order to assess the appropriate rates of pay for the workers who operated each type of machine. However, the employer representatives on this expert committee filled in a questionnaire regarding their own firms which revealed that a majority of them considered a national grading of machines to be 'neither desirable nor feasible'.<sup>166</sup>

Meanwhile another issue had appeared on the industry's negotiating

<sup>165</sup> Trade Union Congress, *Report* (1948), 290-1.

<sup>166</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, Management Board, *Minutes* (7 Feb. 1947).

agenda: a crop of 'local wage applications of a general character', that is applications for increases in district basic rates. The wage rates of manual workers paid by time in the engineering industry consisted of two elements: the standard national time-workers' bonus settled by negotiation between the Engineering Employers' Federation and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions; and the basic rate settled in district (or plant) negotiations which varied according to the grade of worker, and the district. For piece-workers and workers paid by results on some other basis than straight piece-work, a national bonus was paid in addition to earnings determined by output according to times or prices settled in the plant, but guided by a nationally agreed percentage above the relevant time-rate that the 'workman of average ability' should be able to earn.

Alterations in times or prices for piece-workers were relatively frequent, resulting from changes in machinery, methods of work, or materials, but claims for general alterations in district time-rates were relatively rare, except when engineering workers believed that national negotiations over the bonus were unduly protracted. On 15 January 1947 the employers' management board learned that 'a large number of such claims' had been lodged in the districts and rejected by the local employers' associations, and then referred by the unions to the federation for national consideration. The Engineers pressed for a national conference to deal with them, but the management board passed the matter on to its policy committee which advised it on 3 March that all the claims should be rejected; what was needed was 'stability' of wages.

Meeting on 19-21 March, the annual conference of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions resolved that the wage structure in both industries should be brought 'into line with modern conditions', and that the confederation should 'proceed without delay in negotiation with both organisations of Employers with the demand that basic improvements shall be conceded and alterations made in the compilation of the wages structure'. During the debate Jack Jones, the Transport and General Workers' district secretary in Coventry, and also secretary of the Coventry district committee of the confederation, asked 'that District Committees should be consulted and information obtained from them as to what the alleged crazy wage structure really was. He had in mind that national agreements in the past had tied up conditions in the districts, which need never have occurred had information first been obtained about conditions existing locally'. His contribution confirmed both the unions' assertion that the engineering wage structure was in need of revision, and the employers' opinion that revision was likely to prove difficult.

It was not until 25 September that the employers' management board considered the request of the unions for wage-structure negotiations. Its chairman then reported that the federation's specialist committees, including a committee of accountants, had examined the confederation's proposals for revision of the engineering wage structure and had found them too costly. The board decided to tell the unions that it had made no progress on the matter. In December the confederation replied, admitting that there were difficulties, but asking for a meeting of the joint wage-structure committee to review the findings of the expert committees. The employers agreed, but no further meetings are recorded before the publication of the White Paper on 4 February.

Six days later the general purposes committee of the confederation decided on a change of tactics. It submitted straight wage-claims to both the engineering and the shipbuilding employers for revised consolidated rates of pay. The figures were £5.95 a week for skilled shipbuilding workers, £5.75 for skilled engineering workers, and £5 for the unskilled in both industries. The length and character of the preceding negotiations readily explains the votes of the engineering and shipbuilding unions at the conference of trade union executive committees on 24 March.

By the end of 1947 all well-informed trade-unionists were, of course, aware that both the government and the General Council were considering some form of control over wage settlements. Many of their leaders were therefore spurred on to expedite their current negotiations, or to submit new claims; and some employers, although they were also aware of what was afoot, were ready to co-operate. Accordingly, there were several important settlements in January 1948 while the White Paper was being drafted. The boot and shoe industry whose practice was to make general changes in rates of pay every two years, and therefore usually to agree on a higher figure than the industries that generally revised their pay agreements at shorter intervals, had in that month agreed on a wage increase for time-workers of 75p a week for men, and 50p for women, with additions to piece-rates of 10 per cent for men, and 15 per cent for women. Mule-spinners in the cotton industry accepted an increase of 50p a week, with 25p for their assistants, the piecers; and ring-spinners received increases of varying amounts under an agreement intended to relate piece-rates more equitably to the work-load of each class of worker.

Pay negotiations had been running through the autumn of 1947 in the printing industry, with the unions in disarray. By the end of October 'thirteen uncoordinated claims had been presented to the employers'.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Child, 311.



The Master Printers proposed that they should settle all the claims by negotiation with the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation in order to give the industry a 'wage structure', but the unions would consent 'only to hear what the employers have to say', at a meeting between the two federations.<sup>168</sup> They met on 12 November 1947, when the employers offered to bring the rates of all the provincial crafts except the Stereotypers up to the level of the Stereotypers by means of an increase of 45p a week—the Stereotypers having secured a differential of 45p above the others more than twenty years earlier; and they offered 45p also to the London craftsmen. The Typographical Association accepted the provincial offer of 45p which they considered would remove an unjustifiable differential between its members and the Stereotypers; but the other provincial unions rejected it, and so did the London Society of Compositors. The latter union submitted a claim to the National Arbitration Tribunal, arguing that a general increase of 45p for all printing craftsmen would erode their differential. The tribunal awarded it an increase of 75p a week in January 1948.

Following the award, the industry's joint industrial council called a joint conference at which the employers offered a general settlement of 45p for provincial craftsmen, except the Stereotypers, and of 75p in London. These increases were to absorb existing 'merit money' paid to individuals and groups. The conference was adjourned to 4 February, when the employers explained that the 'merit money' to be absorbed did not include 'house money'—an additional rate paid to all employees in the firm—or 'responsibility pay'. They also raised the question of the bearing on the negotiations of the White Paper published that day. The unions, however, rejected the offer, saying they were 'sorry that efforts for a settlement based on a wage structure had failed'.<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, the White Paper had evidently affected the attitude of the unions to the offer, for one by one they individually accepted it, except the Lithographic Printers, who appealed to the National Arbitration Tribunal, which awarded them the same terms as the other unions. The employers also had second thoughts about the Stereotypers' differential, and offered the Stereotypers an increase of 42½p a week, putting them on the same rate as the Lithographers. The Typographers therefore lost their parity with the Stereotypers, regained after twenty-five years but held for only two months.<sup>170</sup> The employers also agreed to drop the

<sup>168</sup> Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, *Annual Report* (1948), 6–7.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>170</sup> After signing the Typographers' agreement, Harry Riding, their secretary, had written in the *Typographical Circular* for Jan. 1948 that it was 'to be distinctly understood that there is not going to be any variation in the ratio between the TA rates and the rate given to anybody else. We accept the [45p] if nobody else is going to get more; or, at least, if they are, we, too, get the extra.'

absorption of merit money, so that clause in the Typographers' agreement was cancelled.

In February the Amalgamated Weavers and other unions in the manufacturing section of the cotton industry had settled for an increase of 37½p a week; and a general revision of wage rates on the railways yielded increases of between 2½p and 42½p a week. In addition the Road Haulage Wages Board agreed an increase of 20p a week. It is easy to understand that unions that had submitted or were about to submit pay-claims should be anxious to secure a settlement before the White Paper's policy took effect, and that many employers had some sympathy with that anxiety.

The government made no attempt to intervene in these negotiations, but, following the publication of the White Paper, the Minister of Labour wrote to the wages councils in terms 'which gave them the impression that he would refer back all proposals [for wage increases] which, in his opinion, conflicted with the Government's policy'.<sup>171</sup> Accordingly, on 23 March, the day before the conference of union executives, the General Council sent a deputation to meet the minister, along with Attlee and Dalton, to tell them that they must withdraw the letter 'as a condition of its willingness to recommend wage restraint to its affiliated unions'.<sup>172</sup> They agreed, and the Council was able to announce to the conference that the letter had been withdrawn. A further letter was sent to the wages councils to say that the minister hoped that they would take the White Paper fully into account. The original letter would not in any case have affected the Road Haulage Wages Board which had made 1 February the date of operation of the 20p increase on which they had agreed, but it would have applied to the decision of the Catering Wages Commission to increase wage rates by amounts varying between 15p and 25p which was announced in March.

The government's retreat over pay increases in wages councils made it virtually impossible for it to intervene in the decisions of non-statutory negotiating bodies, and the flow of pay increases continued. Both the municipal and company sections of road passenger transport settled for an additional 37½p a week in wages in March; and London Transport agreed on the same figure for its metropolitan road services, but its country busmen received 42½p. In the same month the woollen industry increased time-rates by 7.5 per cent and piece-rates by 5 per cent. Time-rates in textile finishing were raised by 37½p for men and by 25p for women, while piece-rates were adjusted to yield earnings higher by 21¼p a week for men and 14p for women. Electricity-supply workers received 27½p a week, and areas classified as B were classified

<sup>171</sup> Bayliss, 96.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* 97.

as A, giving the employees concerned an extra 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>p a week. Also in March, the main section of the steel industry revised its sliding-scale agreements to yield, along with subsequent adjustments due to higher steel prices, an increase of 7p a shift.

Fourteen of the year's twenty-six major wage settlements had therefore been concluded in the first quarter of 1948. Such a concentration of pay settlements is rare, if not unique. Clearly the employers were no less eager to come to terms than were the unions. Otherwise the negotiations would have been more protracted. Some negotiators hurried their discussions along in January and in the first few days of February because they feared that the government was about to introduce some control over pay settlements; and others hastened to conclude agreements after 4 February lest the government should intervene to draw their attention to the White Paper, or even take powers to impose its terms on them.

With no sign of direct intervention in pay negotiations by the government, the pace of settlements slackened off after the end of March. Two public services made agreements to apply from the first week in April: water-supply workers received an extra 36p a week; and gasworkers obtained 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p a week or 5p a shift. In May the Furniture Manufacturing Wages Council introduced a cost-of-living sliding scale to regulate wage adjustments, which initially yielded no less than 73p to men. In June the joint industrial councils in the food industry raised their wages, the increase in the Sugar, Cocoa and Chocolate Council amounting to 38p a week for some occupations. In July wage increases in the clothing wages councils took effect. Employees in bespoke tailoring received 18p a week, and those in the ready-made section 36p a week. In July wage increases in the 'non-trading' services of the local authorities brought 22<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p a week for women, whereas men got 30p in England and Wales, but 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p in Scotland. In August the Hosiery Joint Industrial Council revised its cost-of-living sliding-scale agreement to relate pay changes to the new index of retail prices, which had now replaced the former cost-of-living index as the official guide to movements in domestic consumer prices. The method of making the transition, together with movements in the index, produced a pay increase of 9 per cent. The Civil Engineering Construction Conciliation Board carried through a reclassification of grades which yielded increases of between 9p and 18p a week, according to grade. Wage rates were raised by between 10p and 15p a week by the Licensed Residential Establishments and Licensed Restaurants Wages Council.

Meanwhile the eagerness that seems to have infected so many groups of employers to see that their employees received a pay increase before the government took steps to put its new policy into effect had not been



communicated to the engineering and shipbuilding employers. They had last conceded a general pay increase (other than compensation for loss of earnings due to the introduction of the reduced working week) in April 1946, and the unions were waiting for a response to the application for a wage increase that had been submitted in both industries in February. On 29 April the engineering employers' management board had decided to ask its members to vote on the claim. The results were reported to the next meeting of the board on 27 May. Acceptance of the full claim was rejected by 99.87 per cent of the votes, and acceptance in part by 96.40 per cent. It seemed that the mood of the engineering employers was more belligerent than that of their colleagues in other industries by a wide margin. However, their leaders had offered them a means of escape from what would otherwise have appeared to be an inevitable conflict with the unions. The members had also been asked whether they would give the board and its negotiating committee authority to settle, and 96.40 per cent of the votes had been in favour of doing so. Accordingly the management board told the unions that their claim had been rejected; and the Shipbuilding Employers sent the same message to their unions. However, the unions in both industries were well versed in the negotiating rituals practised by their employers, so it is not surprising that the engineering employers' management board was informed at its next meeting on 24 June that the unions had taken the rejection of their claim 'very quietly' and that threats of one-day strikes 'had not materialised'.

The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions now asked the Minister of Labour to refer both claims to a court of inquiry. He told the engineering employers that he was 'prepared to consider the suggestion sympathetically', and suggested that the two claims might be referred to courts of inquiry composed of the same members. On 22 July the management board 'deprecated the departure from the normal practice of proceeding to the National Arbitration Tribunal', but was 'prepared to agree so long as the draft terms of reference which the Minister had sent them were altered' to make clear that 'the application made by the Trade Unions' had been '*rejected by the Federation*'. In accordance with the minister's proposal, both courts of inquiry consisted of the same employer and the same trade union officer, with Sir John Forster as chairman and C. W. Guillebaud and Sir George Honeyman to add further independent weight to the courts' findings.

On the engineering claim the court reported in August that, judged solely by the standards of the White Paper, it was 'difficult to justify any part of it'. But it noted that claims subject to ongoing negotiations at the time of the issue of the White Paper were allowed to be considered 'on their merits', and this claim had been put to the engineering employers



only two weeks after the White Paper was issued. Moreover, it followed inconclusive wage-structure negotiations which had been going on for two years. The employers had pulled out of these negotiations in December 1947, and the unions had then warned them to expect a general pay-claim. Consequently, although the court 'must be influenced by the consideration of national interest to which the White Paper has referred', and could not therefore recommend an addition to the bonus of the order sought by the confederation, it had decided to recommend 'an increase of 25p a week to the bonus of adult male engineering workers',<sup>173</sup> with consequential adjustments for other grades. The report on the shipbuilding claim traversed the same ground, except that the addition of 25p was in what was still called the 'war bonus'.

The court therefore saved the country, as it was intended that it should, from a conflict that neither side, or the government, wanted to see; and it did so without upsetting the parties, or the government, by revealing the negotiations for the charade that they were. The engineering and shipbuilding employers were trying to avoid the responsibility for granting a wage increase that they considered was in conflict with a government policy of which they approved, although other employers were, with government acquiescence, granting pay increases that formally breached the policy. For their part, the unions were trying to avoid the award by compulsory arbitration of a pay increase, which they were confident would be granted by the National Arbitration Tribunal if the claim was submitted to that body, in order that they might receive it at the hands of a court of inquiry, whose recommendations were not backed by legal sanctions, but which the employers, in the circumstances, could not conceivably have rejected.

However, the court did not conclude its reports with its recommendations for wage increases. It was 'convinced' that the engineering 'wage system . . . is in need of revision and simplification',<sup>174</sup> as many other observers had been before, and others would be in the future, and it recommended that the parties reopen negotiations on 'a new and simplified wage structure'.<sup>175</sup> However, it was not prepared to review the work of the joint committee which had been striving for many months to achieve that objective, in order to show it how it could have avoided the impasse that it had finally reached. But there was one relevant point on which the court was prepared to make a recommendation. It sympathized with the opinion of the unions that there should be greater uniformity in the district rates which formed part of every engineering worker's pay-packet. At the time these rates varied between

<sup>173</sup> Cmd. 7511 (Aug. 1948).

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

£3.06½ and £3.70½ for skilled men, and between £2.36½ and £2.79 for unskilled men. In future, it recommended, district rates for skilled men should not be less than £3.30, and for the unskilled not less than £2.55. Since all the districts paying towards the bottom end of the above ranges employed relatively few engineering workers, implementation of the recommendations would not add greatly to the industry's wage bill. The engineering employers met the confederation on 21 September and again on 30 September, to agree to accept the court's recommendations, and to decide how they should be applied. The unions wanted the increases to be paid retrospectively, but in the end they agreed that they should operate in the first full pay-week after 4 October. Women workers were to receive an increase of 20p a week in their national bonus. Semi-skilled differentials that had been agreed or that depended on 'long-established custom' were to be maintained, but piece-work times and prices were to be adjusted only where they did not yield 27.5 per cent over the piece-worker's basic rate.<sup>176</sup> A roughly comparable settlement was reached in shipbuilding.

It is not easy to find an explanation for the behaviour of the engineering employers over this wage-claim. When employers elsewhere were hastening to settle with their unions on wage advances before the government decided that its wage policy should be rigorously imposed, the federation opposed to the limit the claim from its unions, although it was two years since they had conceded their last wage increase. Had it been in the days of the 'dour'<sup>177</sup> Allan Smith, the contrast might have been attributed to the character of the federation's chief officer; but Smith had long since been replaced by Alexander (now Sir Alexander) Ramsay, in the new office of director, whose 'approach to life was less cold and hard than that of Smith'.<sup>178</sup> Perhaps the behaviour of the federation was intended as a criticism of the government's, rather than of the engineering union's, behaviour. If the government, having ordained a halt to wage increases, which seemed to the engineering employers a wise and timely move, was now encouraging them, along with other employers, to give yet another wage increase before the policy took effect, the engineering employers were not going to comply unless the government made it clear that the concession was made not by their choice but at the government's bidding.

The *Ministry of Labour Gazette* of January 1949 listed agriculture, coalmining, the docks, and merchant shipping, along with some chemical, some clothing, and some food industries, as having had no general pay increase in 1948. Dockers and merchant seamen were not

<sup>176</sup> Management Board, *Minutes* (14 Oct. 1948).

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

<sup>177</sup> Wigham, 77.

accustomed to annual pay increases. Their practice was to settle wages at longer intervals than in other industries, but by more substantial amounts; and that practice had also been followed in coalmining since 1944. Accordingly the great majority of workers who might have expected a pay increase in 1948 had there been no pay policy in fact received a pay increase. The figures<sup>179</sup> show that the number of wage-earners who received pay increases that year was 7,757,000, substantially more than in 1947, when over 5 million workers benefited from a reduction in the length of their standard working week; and rather more than the figure for 1945, but a little less than in 1946. In 1948 the total weekly amount of the increases was just under 1.9 million, substantially less than in 1946, but more than in either 1945 or 1947. It seems that the government's policy of wage restraint had had very little effect. It may have judged it wise to allow the policy to be eased in gently in the hope that it would be more useful to them once it was an established feature in the process of collective bargaining.

The majority of the wage-claims in 1948 had been settled in the first six months of the year, before the General Council began to prepare its 'Review of the Economic Situation'<sup>180</sup> for presentation to Congress in September. The major exceptions were the engineering and ship-building pay-claims, but by the time Congress met the issue had been referred to a court of inquiry which could be expected to award an increase in these industries as well. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the review was an optimistic document.

The deficit of the sterling area for the second quarter of 1948 was £40 million below that of the first quarter, thanks to an increase in exports, which in July reached the highest total yet recorded, and to the receipt of the first Marshall Aid payments. All this had been achieved despite a substantial increase in imports. Although prices of imported foodstuffs and raw materials had risen, government subsidies had held the increase in the retail price index between February and July to no more than 2 points. The report spoke warmly of the readiness of manufacturers and traders to reduce their prices, and of the willingness of firms to conform to the Chancellor's request that dividends should not exceed their 1947 figures. So far the government had been 'remarkably successful' in achieving what the Council saw as the objectives of the policy, which were to: 'seek further assistance from the United States of America . . . ; achieve a speedy and considerable increase in British exports . . . ; secure a rapid and substantial all-round increase in output . . . ; in the meantime [until these measures take full effect] to find means of

<sup>179</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Jan. 1953).

<sup>180</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1948), app. A, p. 565-74.

restraining capital expenditure, the increasing domestic demand for exportable goods and the rising pressure on internal prices'. The General Council believed that it should be continued.<sup>181</sup> Obviously the Council was justified in its pleasure with the performance of the economy over the year so far, but one thing is patently clear: this could not be attributed to the success of the pay policy, since that policy had had almost no influence at all on pay settlements so far.

Cripps, who had been invited to address Congress, gave the delegates an equally encouraging message when he spoke to them on 7 September. He told them that there was no alternative to the policy the government had adopted. Profits could not be squeezed as an alternative to pay restraint, because 'even if corporation profits were reduced by, let me say, a quarter (a very drastic cut) it would mean an average addition to wages and salaries of no more than [1.66p] in the pound'. With the policy as it stood, 'we know that the methods we have employed are succeeding . . . we know too that if we persist in these same policies we can get through our difficulties'.<sup>182</sup> After Tewson had introduced the 'Review' in a speech which overran its allotted time, one of the two women members of the General Council, Dame Anne Loughlin, secretary of the Tailors and Garment Workers, put forward a resolution intended to head off the opposition. Although, she said, the resolution was 'broadly in line with the report', and it was not treated as an amendment, it asked for 'more effective action to control price movements in order to effect a substantial reduction in consumer prices; to maintain and, if need be, extend the cost of living subsidies; . . . and to impose stricter limits on profits'.<sup>183</sup>

The manifestly hostile resolution was moved by Walter Stevens, the Communist secretary of the Electricians. Its concluding words were: 'Congress further declares that the present level of wages is insufficient to maintain a reasonable or an adequate standard of living, and cannot, therefore, support a policy designed to stabilise wages at their present level.'<sup>184</sup> The difference between this attack on the General Council's policy and the reasons given by Papworth for opposing it at the Council meeting of 18 February, when he said that it should include 'a reference to the utilisation of manpower and the improvement of industrial efficiency',<sup>185</sup> reflected the rapidly worsening East-West relations which now allowed the Communist Party to show open opposition to the Labour government. Stevens was supported by spokesmen for the Engineers, the Foundry Workers, and the Vehicle Builders, showing that the opposition to the wage policy of the General Council still came

<sup>181</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1948), app. A, p. 566-74.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* 487.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* 491.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* 363.

<sup>185</sup> See p. 367.



mainly from the engineering and shipbuilding unions, whose protracted pay negotiations had not yet been concluded. The spokesman for the Civil Service Clerical Association drew attention to the ambivalence of the resolution moved by Dame Anne Loughlin by announcing that his union proposed to vote both for her resolution and for the resolution moved by Stevens. At the end of the debate Dame Anne's resolution was carried 'with about six dissentients', Stevens's resolution was defeated by 5,207,000 votes to 2,184,000; and the General Council's report was adopted. The opposition to the policy had marginally increased since the conference of trade union executives in March, but unless it gained momentum many years would be required to defeat the policy.

By 28 February 1949, when the Special Committee on the Economic Situation met prior to a discussion with Cripps, it was less enthusiastic about the policy: 'concern was expressed at the rising level of retail prices. . . . There was agreement that the Chancellor should be advised of the concern felt at the increase in prices . . . and should be asked to consider the possibility of reducing prices by statutory control and also by a reduction in purchase tax.' It moved to the Treasury, where Tom Williamson told Cripps that 'without some visible indication that prices had stopped their upward movement, it would be most difficult to maintain wage stability'. Cripps gave it no comfort, saying that 'Increased domestic productivity was the only real means of securing lower prices', and asking how the government would 'maintain the existing level of expenditure if purchase tax was cut'. He also told them that the employers were contributing more than the unions to the success of the policy. He 'considered that the degree of stability in distributed profits had been much greater than the stability of wage rates', and the consequent increase in undistributed profits had been 'very largely expended on machinery and buildings'.

In 1949 the policy began to bite on wages. The number of wage-earners who received pay increases was 5,205,000, the lowest figure for any of the years between 1945 and 1951 except for 1947, which was the peak year for reductions in the standard working week. But the full impact of the policy can be gauged from the figure for the total weekly amount of pay increases in 1949 which, at £1,076,000, was by far the lowest annual figure for the whole period.<sup>186</sup> Workers in several industries received no increases other than those due to them under cost-of-living sliding-scale agreements, and as the index rose by less than 2 per cent during the year, the increase in the pay-packets of the workers concerned cannot have been much more than a few pence. In one of these industries, building, labourers also received an increase by

<sup>186</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette* (Jan. 1953).

means of an alteration to the differential between craftsmen and labourers, but the amount was only 9p a week. The major industries in which there were no negotiated increases in pay in 1949 included coalmining, the docks, and merchant shipping, which had also gone without an increase in 1948. In addition wage rates remained stable in 1949 in engineering and shipbuilding, textile finishing, paper-making, furniture-making, gas supply, and a number of smaller industries.

Printing figured prominently among the industries whose unions secured substantial increases for their members in 1949, as it had in 1948. Newspaper proprietors have always been more susceptible to trade union pressure than most other employers because of the extreme perishability of their product: yesterday's paper normally has no value today. There had been a stoppage in the summer of 1948 over a claim for an increase in pay in the Manchester offices of the four daily papers that printed their Northern editions there. The men were persuaded to return to work to allow negotiations to proceed in step with discussions over a similar claim for their London colleagues. A general settlement was reached at the beginning of 1949 when the proprietors conceded an all-round increase of 37½p a week both in London and Manchester.

In July 1948, the Typographers, incensed by the loss of their short-lived parity with the Stereotypers, put in a claim for the rate now being received by the Stereotypers, and the other unions followed them. When it was rejected, the Typographers decided to put pressure behind their demand by balloting their members on terminating the clauses in their recent agreement on payment by results and apprentices, and also withdrawing from the agreement on night-shift and double-day-shift working. At this point the employers proposed that they recommence negotiations for a comprehensive wage structure through their national joint industrial council. The union response was 'lukewarm',<sup>187</sup> but in October it decided to call a conference of the unions affiliated to the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation to consider the matter. This conference decided that a subcommittee of two from each union should meet to devise a wage structure. The Typographical Association asked that it conclude its business within a month, as in the mean time no progress could be made on its claim. No promises were made, and the committee was still sitting at the end of December.

Given the complexities of the subject, the subcommittee did well to finish its task in January 1949. It then proposed craft rates of £6.75 in the provinces and £7.75 in London, with two grades of male non-craft employees at 90 per cent and 75 per cent of the craft rate, and 75 per cent of the craft rate for women. However, the method of voting in the

<sup>187</sup> *Typographical Circular* (Nov. 1948).

Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, which for many years had been one vote per union, had been altered the previous year to votes for each union according to its membership. The Stereotypers now objected that if the decision was taken on this basis, the opinions of the smaller unions would be swamped. This and other disagreements were aired at further meetings of the federation at the beginning of 1949, until on 17 March it was resolved 'to inform the employers that the Federation is unable to proceed'.<sup>188</sup>

The joint industrial council considered the outcome on 5 April. The employers wanted to know why the union discussions had failed, and to consider ways of making progress. A member of the Newspaper Society then proceeded to answer the question posed by his own side: 'What was the basic problem? Surely the question was whether the work of a compositor was worth as much as the work of a stereotyper. He felt that this question was capable of detailed study, and that from joint discussions agreement could be reached.' The unions did not comment directly on this contribution to the debate, but rejected the employers' proposal that a special committee of the council be established to consider the problem. Four unions—the Typographers, the Lithographers, the Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers, and the Operative Printers and Assistants—decided to put forward a joint claim, which was presented by Riding on 12 April. With minor alterations it was much the same as the proposals by the subcommittee of the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation. He also referred unfavourably to a letter that the federation had received from the employers in December 1948 giving their conditions for agreeing to a wage structure, which included 'loyal adherence to united and uniform adjustments for a period of years' and 'increased productivity'. The final reply from the employers included not only their alternative structure of grades and rates of pay, but also a further condition of their acceptance. The new structure must be accepted by all the unions. Riding replied that this condition could not be met, and that his members, whom it was 'getting impossible to hold', would be further enraged when they learned of it.<sup>189</sup>

The Typographers decided to apply their threatened sanctions if the claim for parity was not granted by 10 September. Moreover, the branches were to be encouraged to secure the same wages as were paid to Stereotypers by covert pressure on the employers. As Order 1305 was still in force, there were to be no strikes or reference to the National Arbitration Tribunal. The union's executive believed that the 'withdrawal of goodwill and co-operation in each office is likely to secure the simple measure of justice which has so far been denied us' The union

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* (May 1949).

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* (Aug. 1949).



also gave notice of withdrawal from the joint industrial council; and undertook to pay any member who was dismissed for acting on the executive's instructions £4 a week. The October issue of the *Typographical Circular* headlined the 'Magnificent Response' of the branches, whose members had voted by five to one in support of the proposals. The employers, by contrast, suffered two reverses. They appealed to the Minister of Labour for intervention under Order 1305, only to be told that there was no dispute under that order. Their application to the courts for an injunction on the ground that the union had not given sufficient notice of its intention to apply sanctions failed. On 29 September Lord Devlin ruled that 'it was unlikely that the parties intended the agreements to operate perpetually' and, since fourteen days was the accepted period of notice for individuals, there was no reason why it should be longer for the termination of a collective agreement.<sup>190</sup> The *Circular* also asserted that 'numerous employers in every part of the country have expressed privately their agreement that our claim for parity is just, and the number of employers who have already conceded our members' claims grows daily'.<sup>191</sup>

The Ministry of Labour brought the two sides together at the end of September, and a formula was agreed which enabled the union to call off its 'aggressive measures'. Negotiations between the unions and the employers in October led to agreement on revised grades for the crafts, with parity between Typographers and Stereotypers, and extra payment for shift work. The unions were to accept payment by results subject to an undertaking by the employers to consult the branches and chapels, and they also accepted a 'bonus' increase of 200 apprentices instead of a permanent increase in the agreed number of apprentices. The *Typographical Circular* was able to proclaim that 'The injustice which has rankled with our members ever since 1922 has been removed'.<sup>192</sup>

Industries in which there were no pay increases in 1949 did not necessarily avoid negotiations over wages. The court of inquiry that reported in August 1948 on the disputes in the engineering and shipbuilding industries not only recommended wage increases, but also told the parties that they should reopen negotiations on the revision of their wage structures. In November the engineering employers set up a committee to study the matter. Having ruminated on it over the winter, they reported to the management board on 28 April 1949. The board agreed to write to the confederation to say that the committee's investigations had revealed 'many difficulties which the employers desired to discuss with the Unions'. This, they thought, would enable

<sup>190</sup> *Typographical Circular* (Oct. 1949).

<sup>192</sup> *Typographical Circular* (Nov. 1949).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* See also Clegg, *History*, ii. 331.



them to discover whether the unions were prepared to co-operate in examining 'the difficulties and their possible solution'.

The unions did not reply directly to the request. Instead they sent the employers their own wage-structure proposals. They wanted six grades of male manual workers: labourers, three semi-skilled grades, a skilled grade, and a sixth grade for highly skilled men, such as millwrights, maintenance electricians, toolmakers, and patternmakers, who were to receive special allowances above the skilled rate. The proposal was formally presented to the employers on 14 June but soon afterwards, despite Tanner's warning in his annual address to the Engineers' national committee that 'the policy of restraint is an inescapable obligation of Unions at the present time',<sup>193</sup> the committee resolved to propose to the confederation the submission of a claim to the employers for a wage increase of £1 a week for all adult male engineering workers. This decision greatly reduced the likelihood of a wage increase for engineering workers in 1949. Given the voting strength of the Engineers in the confederation, the proposal was bound to be accepted there, overriding the suggested revision of the wage structure; and it was equally certain that the employers would reject it. Their hesitation over the wage-structure issue shows that they felt vulnerable on that topic. No one could deny the extraordinary complication of the engineering wage structure, and it was arguable that simplification might promote greater efficiency in the industry, and so qualify for exceptional treatment under the relevant clause of the White Paper. By contrast the claim for £1 all round was manifestly contrary to the policy, and there was no reason why the engineering employers should entertain it.

Why had the national committee chosen to destroy the confederation's chance of negotiating a wage increase, or at least wage increases for some workers, in this way? The Communist Party had considerable strength on the national committee. By now that party was highly critical of the Labour government, and of the leadership of the Trades Union Congress, the two bodies responsible for the wage policy. It could be that the party's leaders had decided that a frontal attack on the wage policy was the most effective means of bringing down the government and undermining the authority of the government's trade union allies who dominated the General Council of Congress. However, most of the Communists who were active in the trade unions were also competent trade unionists, and those of them who were members of the Engineers' national committee may have regretted the loss of the opportunity of securing pay increases for many, if not all, of their members by exploiting the wage structure issue. On 30 June the engineering

<sup>193</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (July 1949).

employers' management board resolved to write to the confederation again to ask it for its 'practical proposals' to overcome the difficulties of designing a new wage structure for the industry. Again there was no direct reply; but on 16 September the confederation's general council decided to submit a claim for an increase of £1 a week to be paid to all adult male workers in both the engineering and the shipbuilding industries. It was to be 'paid out of profits', so that there would be no consequent increase in prices.

In July 1948 the annual general meeting of the Railwaymen decided to submit a claim for a flat-rate wage increase for all 'conciliation staff' on the railways. The executive committee put the claim in without consulting either of the other two railway unions. It was rejected by the Railway Executive which had taken over from the railway companies when transport nationalization took effect on 1 January 1948. In December 1948 the union reported a dispute to the Ministry of Labour. The minister told it that the claim must be referred to the Railway Staff National Tribunal. The union replied that the tribunal was inappropriate, since the other railway unions were not parties to the claim. For some reason this disagreement was reported to the National Arbitration Tribunal, which judged that the Railway Staff National Tribunal was the appropriate body, although the union made it clear that it would have preferred a court of inquiry. On 18 March 1949 the Railway Staff National Tribunal, relying 'on the White Paper on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices, the financial position of the railways, and the costs of the suggested wage increase as its principal reasons . . . concluded that the claim "had not been established"',<sup>194</sup>

The union executive summoned a special general meeting for 22 April. The meeting asked the general secretary, Jim Figgins, to arrange for a deputation to meet the Prime Minister, along with the Ministers for Transport and Labour. In the end it saw only the Minister of Labour, Isaacs. He suggested that the union should put in a new claim. It did so, for a flat-rate increase of 50p a week. The union's case was that railway wages had fallen behind those of other industries, and that the lowest-paid grades were 'below a reasonable standard of subsistence'. The Railway Executive replied that it could make no offer. After the union had made another appeal to Isaacs on 3 June 1949, the Railway Executive made a gesture towards dealing with the second part of the union's case by offering an increase of 15p a week to the lowest-paid grades only. This the union rejected as 'totally inadequate'.<sup>195</sup>

At this point the Railwaymen, traditionally the most loyal to the Labour Party among the major unions, with the possible exception of

<sup>194</sup> Bagwell, 609.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* 610.

the Miners, decided that their patience had been tried too far. Another special general meeting was called. The delegates instructed their members to cease working all payment-by-results systems, to work to rule, and to ban overtime from midnight on 3 July. Before that date the Minister of Labour decided that he was, after all, entitled to submit the dispute to an inquiry, on the grounds that the parties had not agreed terms of reference for the Railway Staff National Tribunal. The union deferred the operation of its sanctions, and the minister appointed a board of conciliation, to which the other railway unions also made submissions—but not in support of the Railwaymen's claim. The board, chaired by Sir John Forster, found against the claim. According to Figgins, speaking to a special general meeting of his union on 29 September, when the board heard the Railway Executive's spokesman tell them that the average earnings of railway workers were £6.70 a week, 'it had a "devastating effect" on the independent members'.<sup>196</sup> The only concession that the Railwaymen secured was granted voluntarily by the Railway Executive while the parties were waiting for the board's report. It was the abolition of 'rural rates', lower than those paid elsewhere in the railway system, which applied in a few remote areas. The decision affected about 10,000 men, each of whom received an advance of 5p a week.

*'Severe Restraint'*

While these negotiations over the pay of engineering workers and railwaymen were proceeding during the spring and summer of 1949, the British economy ran into the economic crisis due to depression in the United States, and remedied it by devaluation of the pound which brought rapid recovery.<sup>197</sup> The government did not consider that this justified any relaxation in its wage policy. It feared that an increase in the wage level might push up costs to such an extent as to nullify the advantage that devaluation had given to British exports. The first reaction of the General Council when it met on 20 September was to issue a statement saying that it was not yet in a position to make a judgement, but they planned an early meeting with Cripps. After seeing him, it referred the matter to its Special Committee on the Economic Situation, whose members do not seem to have taken long to decide where their duty lay.

At an early stage in the series of meetings at which they examined the question the Special Committee agreed that the General Council had the two-fold responsibility of framing a policy which would contribute towards avoiding the increased danger of inflation, but which would not prejudice the independence

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* 611.

<sup>197</sup> See above.

of the trade union movement. . . . They therefore came to the conclusion that it would be necessary to urge unions to exercise even greater restraint than they had exercised in the past.<sup>198</sup>

According to the published *Report* of the Trades Union Congress for 1950, the special committee discussed its detailed proposals following from this preamble with Cripps, Bevin, and Aneurin Bevan on 22 November 1949 and then presented them to the General Council on the following day. But the account omits two other meetings of the General Council on the consequences of devaluation for the unions, held on 26 October and 9 November.

At the first of these meetings, the special committee presented a document which it had not yet finalized, although the General Council noted that the committee's view was 'that devaluation made it necessary to act with even greater restraint on wages even though it was certain that prices were going to rise because of devaluation'. At the end of the meeting the Council issued a press statement to say that it believed that government economies 'will, if vigorously applied, have the effect over the next twelve months of reducing substantially the present inflationary pressure on prices and encouraging the diversion of the country's resources to expansion of the export trade'. However, no final decision had yet been taken 'on questions of trade union policy', including 'the extent to which the Trades Union Congress may require to revise its incomes policy', although the General Council 'agreed with the conclusion reached by its Special Committee, emphasising the need for the utmost restraint in wages claims'. It seems reasonable to infer from these quotations that the members of the special committee were not entirely confident of the reception they would get from their colleagues, and that their colleagues hesitated to agree with all the proposals put to them. By 9 November, however, all doubts and hesitations were put aside. The Council gave unanimous approval to a document entitled 'Devaluation and Wages', which, Tewson emphasized, was not a continuation of the policy agreed in 1948 which had aimed to secure the 'stabilisation of prices' and 'the maintenance of real wages'. The detailed proposals included 'rigorous restraint upon all increases in wages, salaries and dividends', while 'maintaining the voluntary machinery of negotiation'. There was an admission that certain cases of low pay 'may call for consideration', but unions were recommended 'to reconsider existing wage claims with a view to withdrawal, including sliding-scale agreements', and encouraged to relate 'wages to output' and to 'intensify the campaign for increased output'.

The next meeting of the General Council was on 23 November. Its minutes refer to the meeting between the special committee and the

<sup>198</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1950), 263-4.



three ministers on 22 November, at which 'the discussion . . . was mainly concerned with the responsibility both of the trade union movement and of the Government to take all necessary action to avoid inflation and maintain full employment'. The proposals adopted by the General Council were much the same as those recorded in the minutes of the meeting on 9 November except for three points: first, even in cases of low pay 'regard' must 'be had to the general problems necessitating rigorous restraint'; secondly, 'special regard' should be given to the possibility of assisting lower-paid workers by the establishment of incentive schemes'; and, thirdly, the proposal on cost-of-living sliding scales had been made more rigorous, and extended to cover all industries whether with or without cost-of-living scales. It now read:

agreed wage rates should be held stable whilst the Interim Index of Retail Prices remains between upper and lower limits of 118 and 106; on the express condition that if and when the Index figure reaches either the upper or lower limit, both sides of any industry would be entitled to resume normal consideration of wages questions in accordance with the provisions of their agreements, and that cost-of-living agreements would again operate. Should neither of these limits be reached before January 1, 1951, the above arrangements shall continue until that date and be reviewed in the light of the then existing facts.

It is not difficult to guess what had happened. Either at the meeting with the three ministers or before, the government had become aware of the proposals agreed at the General Council's meeting on 9 November. The Council was informed that they were inadequate and must be strengthened, and had revised them accordingly. The minutes of the special committee for this period are not included in the files deposited in the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University; and the relevant passage of the annual report of Congress for 1950 is unhelpful. It reads:

When the Special Committee were ready to report to the General Council they decided that, in accordance with their usual practice, the Government should be informed of the nature of the recommendations which they were to make to the General Council . . .

The discussion with the Ministers was mainly concerned with the responsibility of both the trade union movement and the Government to take all necessary action to avoid inflation and to maintain full employment. The Committee pointed out that their recommendations, if accepted by the Movement, would represent a substantial contribution to national recovery, but that their effectiveness would be jeopardised by any failure on the part of other sections of the community to make their contribution.<sup>199</sup>

In contrast to the committee's earlier proposals considered by the

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* 263.

General Council on 9 November, this revised version did not secure unanimous support. Openshaw of the Engineers and Hill of the Boilermakers referred to the claim for £1 a week currently being pursued by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions; Crawford of the Boot and Shoe Operatives reported that his union's cost-of-living sliding-scale agreement was running out, and the employers were being pressed to renew it; and Figgins, perhaps still smarting from the treatment of his union's claim by the Railway Executive, said that he could not support a policy that was 'inimical to the interests of the workers'.

Nevertheless the revised proposals secured an easy victory. They were passed with only two dissentients—the minutes make no mention of abstentions. It was agreed that they should be circulated to the unions, and then put before a conference of union executives. At this conference, union leaders would be asked by the General Council, at the behest of the government, to accept a policy that, if the cost of living continued to rise, as devaluation had made almost certain it would, was bound to bring a reduction of real wages to British workers, and therefore in their standard of living, and deny to many workers increases in pay that would fall due to them under their current agreements.

When the Council met again on 21 December, Owen of the Blastfurnacemen told them that his union was ready to forgo increases due under their sliding-scale agreement, but 'that decision was contingent upon other Unions operating sliding scale agreements supporting the proposals'. There was evidently some doubt about whether this condition would be met, for it was proposed that the special committee should see the building unions to persuade them to suspend their sliding scale. On the other hand, some members of the Council considered that 'no further meetings should take place with sliding scale Unions in view of the decision arrived at by the Special Committee on December 14 that there was no justifiable reason for altering or modifying the policy already decided upon by the General Council'. This seems to show that tempers were wearing thin. However, a majority favoured going ahead with the meeting, and it was enlarged to include other unions with sliding-scale agreements. The special committee emphasized to them

that the difficulties were not confined to unions with cost of living sliding-scale agreements, the members of which had in fact received advances in wages during a period when many other workpeople had received no increases. The Committee therefore urged the unions concerned to bear in mind the importance of securing a unified effort on the part of the Movement if the long-term interests of all trade unionists were to be defended.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1950), 264.

The conference of union executives had been arranged for 12 January 1950. Even before that date the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives told the General Council that it could not 'agree to suspend their cost of living sliding-scale, as this would mean foregoing an increase which had mainly accrued before the date of devaluation. In any case it was by no means certain that the employers would agree to suspend the agreement.'<sup>201</sup> Clearly the General Council had promised the government to deliver sacrifices from its members that many of them were not willing to make. This was confirmed at the conference of executives which voted for the new policy, but by a majority of only 4,263,000 to 3,606,000. Traditionally the Railwaymen were one of the most loyal among major unions to the Labour Party, but they nevertheless voted against the government's policy. Other traditionally loyal unions were the Woodworkers and the Boot and Shoe Operatives, two of the many sliding-scale unions to vote against the recommendation. Such a slender majority gave the General Council no authority to penalize or even remonstrate with unions that failed to comply. Within 'a matter of weeks . . . it became apparent that many unions with sliding scales were continuing to operate their agreements, and were not able to accept the General Council's recommendation that they should be suspended temporarily'.<sup>202</sup>

Before the other consequences of the policy of 'severe restraint', as it came to be called, could be assessed, there was a general election on 23 February 1950 in which the Labour Party retained an overall majority, but of no more than five. This result was taken by the government as a mandate to carry on with its policies, including their policy of severe pay restraint—apart from the now abandoned provisions on cost-of-living sliding scales. However, on 24 March the special committee met Cripps along with Gaitskell, now Minister for Economic Affairs, and Harold Wilson, who had succeeded Cripps as president of the Board of Trade in 1947. Chastened by the rebuff of many of its unions, the committee emphasized the loyalty that the unions had shown so far, and warned that 'it was impossible for a voluntary association such as the TUC to maintain indefinitely a policy of wage restraint, and that . . . the General Council could give no guarantees about future developments'. It questioned Cripps again about dividends. This time his reply was that 'on the whole the limitation of dividends had been about as successful as the degree of restraint on wage-claims by trade unions'.<sup>203</sup>

From this meeting onwards, the minutes of the special committee (once more available) give a substantially fuller account of the meeting than that provided by the annual report of Congress. In particular, they

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* 265.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* 266.

record that Cripps asked 'whether it would be possible to restrict wage-increases to selected cases. Would it be possible, for example, for the trade union movement to share out an agreed sum of, say, £50 million, which would allow moderate increases in some directions, but would prevent a general wage-spiral from beginning?' Deakin replied that the special committee 'had discussed the possibility of setting up a body to exercise an overall control over wage-claims, but had not considered this practicable'. That Cripps apparently thought it might be practicable betrayed an ignorance of the structure and working of British trade unions which goes a long way to account for the government's attempt to force a rigorous wage policy on them during the winter just past.

There followed a series of meetings of the special committee and the General Council which attempted to redefine trade union policy on wage restraint. Tewson, who had become effectively the government's spokesman on the General Council, continued to insist on a firm policy. At the end of the Council's meeting on 26 April he

stressed that it would be unfortunate if any indication were given that the General Council were wavering from their policy of restraint. It might be that the General Council would have to seek permission from Congress to pursue a line of policy which would place in the hands of the General Council more specific co-ordinated authority than they had at present.

When the Council met again on 24 May Deakin and Lincoln Evans of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation objected to a passage in the minutes of the last meeting of the special committee saying that the committee had been 'generally agreed that an attempt should be made to bring wage claims by sections of the Movement into accord with each other by the provision of arrangements for consultation between the General Council and the unions concerned'. Even these formerly stalwart supporters of wage policy were becoming tired of their secretary's attempts to devise new arrangements to prolong the life of the policy; and Figgins insisted that 'the policy of restraint had now become inoperative'.

In the end the representatives of the cotton unions, Naesmith and Roberts, proposed that the contested passage should be rewritten:

The Committee were in agreement on the fundamental importance of continued restraint in wage claims; on the other hand the rigidity resulting from the present application of the policy in certain cases could not be tolerated indefinitely and could endanger the established system of collective bargaining. It was the general opinion that it was preferable for the more reasonable wage claims to be conceded in moderation rather than that indiscriminate demands should be made.

This version was accepted, and it was agreed that a draft statement for



circulation to the unions should be prepared for the June meeting. There was more wrangling when this draft was considered on 18 June, but eventually the text was agreed and circulated to the unions. It was a rambling document, going over the changing fortunes of the economy and the development of wage policy during the last two years, but the penultimate paragraph indicated a qualified but indeterminate relaxation of the policy:

The General Council . . . must adopt the practical course of recognising that there must be greater flexibility of wage movements in the future than was envisaged in the policy approved by the Conference of Executives in January. They are firmly convinced that there is no formula that can be devised as to how this flexibility can operate. Its operation must be left to the good sense and reasonableness which has been displayed by the Unions, particularly in the post-war period, and with full account being taken of the continued warning of the General Council that our basic difficulties remain, if temporarily lessened in their intensity.

Meanwhile, these protracted trade union debates over wage policy had remarkably little effect on current wage negotiations. There was little relaxation of restraint in the wage agreements made during the first six months of 1950. In January a number of wage increases which had been settled in 1949 took effect. There were modest increases in the first quarter of the year under cost-of-living sliding scales in building, footwear, furniture, and hosiery; and the employers and unions in civil engineering signed a sliding-scale agreement which yielded immediate increases. In June there were increases for some grades in the Post Office, ranging from 5p to 45p. But these are almost all the pay increases noted by the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* during the six months. They did not amount to an opening of the floodgates. There were also some wage increases in July and August. In July the two Wages Councils for Wholesale Grocery and Provisions, which had not been among the wages councils that raised their rates of pay in January, agreed to increases of 25p a week, and the co-operatives followed with increases of 20–30p for men, and 12½p for women. Shift-workers in paper-making received 37p a week in August, with 22½p for dayworkers.

It was also in August that two of the country's major industries concluded prolonged pay negotiations on behalf of their low-paid workers. After the failure of their general pay-claim in 1949,<sup>204</sup> the Railwaymen had decided to ask for a wage increase for low-paid workers only, by proposing a minimum rate of £5 in the provinces and £5.15 in London. They discussed the claim with the other railway unions, and were given some encouragement by the Railway Clerks. Negotiations

<sup>204</sup> See pp. 384–5.

were protracted, but in August 1950 the Railway Staff National Tribunal awarded an increase of 17½p in the basic weekly rate, 'with certain consequential adjustments in rates above the basic and with comparable adjustments for clerical staff'.<sup>205</sup> The Miners also made some 'very modest proposals for lifting up the "lowest paid workers"'.<sup>206</sup> Rejected by the Coal Board, the claim went to the industry's National Reference Tribunal which awarded a sum of £3.5 million a year to be used for this purpose. Accordingly, in October the national minimum rate was increased by 25p and the daily rates of dayworkers by 2½p.

Up to this point there had been no serious breach in the policy of severe restraint. It is true that, taking the year as a whole, there was a pronounced relaxation of the policy. The number of wage-earners who received pay increases in 1950 was 7.4 million, compared with 5.2 million in 1949, and the total value of these increases, at over £2 million a week, was almost double the figure for 1949. The contrast between the two years, however, was almost entirely due to pay increases negotiated in the last four months of 1950. Without them, 1950 would have gone down in history as the outstanding year of pay restraint, with fewer wage increases of lower amounts than any other post-war year.

### *The End of Wage Policy*

By the time the delegates to the annual meeting of Congress gathered in Brighton in September, Britain's economic prospects had worsened again as a consequence of the government's decision to support the American military action in Korea on behalf of the United Nations, which was bound to increase government expenditure and inflationary pressure in Britain. On 17 August Cripps had met the General Council to tell it of the government's rearmament proposals. He went on to say in relation to wages that 'although our economic situation appeared more favourable we cannot at present afford anything but a limited relaxation of the very rigid standards laid down after devaluation.'

The statement that the General Council had agreed on 25 July<sup>207</sup> was presented to Congress by Tewson in an unusually brief speech on 7 September. He was followed by Walter Stevens, the Communist secretary of the Electricians, who moved yet another hostile resolution, which concluded: 'Congress declares that wage increases can be met without resulting in increased prices, for example by reducing profits, and therefore calls on the General Council to abandon any further

<sup>205</sup> Bagwell, 612.

<sup>206</sup> Baldwin, 138.

<sup>207</sup> At this meeting there were proposals for more price controls and subsidies 'to prevent further inflationary tendencies', and international action on raw material prices.

policy of wage restraint, and at the same time urges the Government to introduce statutory control of profits.<sup>208</sup> It was seconded by L. C. White of the Civil Service Clerical Association, a veteran critic of the General Council. The debate was not prolonged. Spokesmen for the Foundry Workers and the Plumbers gave it their support. Only Deakin and Tewson opposed it, and their speeches were brief. When the votes were counted, the resolution had been passed by 3,949,000 votes to 3,727,000; and the General Council's statement was rejected by 3,898,000 to 3,521,000. Given the perfunctory way the debate was handled, it may be assumed that Congress staff had assessed the way the votes would go beforehand, and warned Tewson and Deakin of what they must expect.

Wage policy was dead. The floodgates were opened for a torrent of wage increases to pour through. The government made no serious effort to resist it, the employers were ready to settle, and the amounts rose well above those earlier in the year. The increases of 30p a week for men and 25p for women awarded by the Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales on 22 September did not clearly establish a new trend. Farmworkers could with justice claim to be among the lower-paid, and the National Farmers' Union resisted the claim which was carried by the votes of the independent members. The amounts were not out of line with some of those granted to lower-paid workers earlier in the year. Indeed the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board refused to grant any increase. The pace was set by the engineering settlement.

The claim was still for a general increase of £1 a week for manual workers in the engineering and shipbuilding industries which had been proposed by the executive committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions in September 1949 and approved by a conference of representatives of affiliated unions that November, although their claim for a new wage structure had not yet been settled or rejected. Meanwhile the engineering employers had written on 21 October to suggest that the claim for £1 should be reconsidered 'in view of the changed national situation arising from the devaluation of sterling'.<sup>209</sup> The confederation's executive, however, decided to press for an early conference on the claim, and presented its case on 30 November. The expected rejection was held back until February 1950, after the policy of severe restraint proposed by the General Council of Congress had been approved by a narrow margin. In March the parallel shipbuilding claim was also rejected.

The Engineers' national committee was recalled to consider the next step in its pursuit of a general increase of £1. Tanner proposed that it

<sup>208</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1950), 464-9.

<sup>209</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (Dec. 1949).

ask the government to set up an inquiry, but the delegates settled on a ballot to decide between a strike in contravention of Order 1305 and submission of the claim to the National Arbitration Tribunal. Tanner, as its president, had the task of presenting the proposal for a ballot to a conference of executives of unions affiliated to the confederation which met on 2 March 1950. Amendments were submitted but, since the Engineers needed the support of no more than two or three other unions to secure a majority, the amendments were defeated, and the ballot was agreed.

In his address to the annual meeting of the Engineers' national committee in June, Tanner made no mention of the claim or the ballot (on which members of the confederated unions were now voting), but said, 'I do not see how any worker, except those who completely failed to understand the position, or those who oppose the Labour Government . . . could oppose the General Council policy of some restraint in wage claims'.<sup>210</sup> The meeting passed no fewer than eighty resolutions, including an instruction to the executive council 'to conduct a national publicity campaign to win all possible support for our claim'; another reaffirming its wage structure proposals, and authorizing a reference to a court of inquiry if they were not accepted; and a third seeking the abolition of the National Arbitration Tribunal—'a subterfuge behind which employers evade their obligations, and a barrier preventing workers achieving their rightful dues'. It also decided that the procedure agreement should be terminated, since 'the employers appear to be adamant against all approaches from the C[onfederation] [of] S[hip-building] [and] E[ngineering] U[nions]'.<sup>211</sup>

The result of the ballot was 326,233 votes for a reference to the National Arbitration Tribunal against 111,049 for a strike, but no such reference had been made by 20 September, when the engineering employers, thirteen days after Congress had repudiated the wage policy, offered the confederation increases of 55p on the base time-rates of skilled workers, with 40p for labourers and women workers, together with the consolidation of the national bonus with these new rates to yield minimum weekly rates of £5.90 for skilled workers and £5 for labourers. Henceforth these new rates were to be used for the calculation of holiday pay, overtime, and other premium payments. Piece-workers' base rates were not to be altered, but the minimum piece-work standard was to be raised from 27.5 per cent to 45 per cent. There was to be no consolidation of national bonus with base rates for piece-workers, but instead of a national bonus, each piece-worker was to receive a

<sup>210</sup> Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Monthly Journal* (July 1950).

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* (Aug. 1950).



'pieceworker's supplement' of £1.65 a week; and his overtime and other premium payments were to be calculated by reference to the appropriate time-worker's consolidated rate. These changes, taken together, were intended to yield comparable increases in earnings for time-workers and piece-workers. They provided a substantial increase in pay along with a new pay structure. The staff of the employers' federation had not been idle during the period of severe restraint.

The executives of the confederated unions met on 29 September. The two general unions were keen to accept the offer, but the Engineers carried the meeting for rejection. The employers would not alter their proposals, so on 13 October the union executives met again to consider a proposal that the claim be referred to the National Arbitration Tribunal, a body that the Engineers' national committee had voted to abolish! The General and Municipal Workers moved to accept the offer, but they were defeated by 97 votes to 35, and the dispute was referred to the tribunal.

The tribunal evidently considered that the engineering wage structure was too complicated to be successfully modified by outsiders. Its ruling was that the parties should meet again and endeavour to reach agreement on the basis of the offer. They met and reached agreement on 28 November. The main structure of the offer remained, but with modifications to meet the complaints of workers who might feel badly treated if it had been applied as it stood. There were to be graduated increases for workers who had been receiving lieu rates and 'merit rates commonly applied' up to figures of £5.30 a week for labourers and £6.41 for skilled workers; individual merit rates, national craft differentials, and district differentials were all to be maintained. Some of the complexities of the engineering wage structure therefore survived the reform.

Meanwhile there had been wage increases in other industries. In October the Road Haulage Executive had adopted standard rates throughout their services, which involved pay increases for many workers; and in December the Road Haulage Wages Board increased the pay of workers still employed by private hauliers by 35p a week. Also in December, the Joint Industrial Council for Local Authority Services (Manual Workers) in England and Wales increased the wages of men by 25p a week, and the Joint Industrial Council for Roadmen settled for an increase of 30p a week. Both the Miners and the railway unions had submitted general pay-claims immediately after their submissions for their low-paid members had been settled in August. Agreements were reached on both these further claims in January 1951. The Miners and the Coal Board settled for increases of 35p a week underground and 25p on the surface, but the railway unions and the Railway Executive showed

their worries about declining differentials by adopting graduated increases ranging from 17½p up to 67½p a week. Also in January the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board awarded the same increase as the board for England and Wales had done in September; the spinning and weaving sections of the cotton industry both settled for advances of 10 per cent for all grades; and the wool industry made its general increase 5 per cent. During the next four months substantial wage increases were negotiated in building, the docks, gas supply, the hospitals, and the Post Office. In June came the first instance of a second general pay increase in an industry where wages had already been increased in 1951. In January the British Electricity Authority had settled a wage-claim from the electricity-supply unions for an increase of 27½p a week; it now added a further 37p a week.

### *Salaries under Wage Policy*

Although the government's policy for controlling inflation was generally called a 'wage policy', it was also intended to be a 'pay policy', including salaries, and an 'incomes policy', including profits and dividends, and even, to make use of a title popularized by a subsequent Labour government, 'a prices and incomes policy'—since the acknowledged aim of the policy was to keep prices as stable as possible. Nevertheless success or failure was judged almost exclusively by movements in the wage index or in the index of average earnings of wage-earners; and alterations in salaries received less public attention.

The practice in the engineering industry had been for the Engineering Employers' Federation to recommend periodic increases in what was still called the 'war allowance' for staff which was intended to be paid in addition to the basic salary. The latter was also, in many cases, increased from time to time by way of regular increases, or annual reviews, which were matters for the individual firms to arrange; and many did so after discussion with recognized staff unions. The federation also discussed alterations in the war allowances with these unions.

On 30 October 1947 the management board of the federation considered a letter from the white-collar section of the Transport and General Workers' Union (formally the National Association of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs) asking for an increase of 50p a week in the war allowance. Since the Clerical and Administrative Workers had the largest membership among the unions organizing staff grades in engineering, the board took the view that it would be unwise to negotiate separately with a minority union. However, when the union secretary wrote again in December to tell the employers that his executive had

instructed him to press the claim, the board agreed to grant him a conference; but the next month he wrote again to say that a conference was unnecessary because the union had decided to proceed 'locally', presumably to seek increases in basic salaries, firm by firm. Perhaps his union had received a warning, or guessed, that the government was planning a pronouncement on wage policy that would rule out a general claim, and thought it had better proceed as fast as it could to secure increases in basic salaries from individual firms.

In 1944 the federation had granted a somewhat reluctant recognition to the Association of Supervisory Staffs, Executives and Technicians, but 'only where the union had majority membership in a particular grade in a particular establishment'.<sup>212</sup> However, at a meeting of the union's executive on 14-15 February 1948, it was decided that the government wage policy recently announced did not apply to its members, and on 29 April it approached the employers with a request for a minimum salary because of the 'marginal difference' between the salary of a supervisor and 'the operative wage'. The federation's staff committee took the view that the wide diversity of practice among member firms precluded the introduction of a general salary-scale for foremen, who made up the major part of the union's membership; and the management board 'decided that the claim was illogical and should be refused'.<sup>213</sup>

When on 14 October 1948 the board gave its approval to a settlement with the manual workers' unions for an increase of 25p a week on the national bonus for men and 20p for women,<sup>214</sup> it went on to accept the proposal of its staff committee that it 'recommend' to member firms that war allowances for staff be raised by the same amounts. At the same meeting the board learned that the National Association of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs had changed its mind again, and was now claiming 'substantial increases' in basic salaries for staff. There was some support for this proposal in the ranks of the employers. The Manchester Engineering Employers' Association, which had a local agreement on basic salaries in its area, reported that 'there was extreme difficulty of securing the services of junior female clericals at the Manchester Agreement rates'; and the staff committee admitted that the difficulty was 'now almost national in character'. Nevertheless the committee recommended that the claim be rejected, and the board agreed.

The union resubmitted its claim in February 1949, on this occasion asking for a national scale of clerical rates, and the management board asked the associations for their views. The replies were considered by the board at its meeting on 31 March. Fifteen associations voted to

<sup>212</sup> Engineering Employers' Federation, Management Board, *Minutes* (28 Jan. 1943; 27 Apr. 1944).

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* (29 Apr. 1948).

<sup>214</sup> See pp. 375-6.

reject the claim, and twenty-five wanted some concession, but most of the latter group wanted it to be confined to female staff between the ages of 15 and 25. Of the seven that commented on the demand for a national scale, five opposed it. The London association did not favour the introduction of a special London rate for women clerical staff, since there was no London differential for women manual workers. In the end the board recalled that a national claim for increased pay for apprentices, boys, and youths had recently been turned down, and gave that as its reason for rejecting the claim for junior female staff.

At its meeting on 30 June 1949 the management board had occasion to determine the status of the war allowance. The Draughtsmen had complained of a firm that it refused to pay the 25p increase in the allowance granted in October 1948 to its members on the ground that payment was not mandatory, and that its draughtsmen were already paid at a basic rate that was higher than that paid by other firms in the district. The board did not accept the firm's case, and said that its 'recommendations had for all practical purposes the force of an agreement'. The engineering staff unions had to wait for a further general increase in the allowance until after the federation had settled with the manual engineering unions in November 1950. In December the allowances were increased in line with the increases in wages granted to manual workers. Male staff received the 55p a week being paid to skilled manual workers, and female staff the 34p being paid to women manual workers.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that many employers in other private industries followed the same practice as the engineering employers by granting much the same increases to their staff employees, other than senior staff, as had been authorized for manual workers by agreement. In some instances, employers' associations may have recommended that this be done, as the engineering employers did. This is especially likely to have been the practice in those industries, such as iron and steel and printing, where a substantial proportion of staff employees were organized by the manual workers' unions.

Much more information, however, is available concerning the salaries of public employees under the wage policy. Past practice on school-teachers' salaries was to settle them for a period of years, usually three years at a time. The 1945 agreement was therefore renegotiated in 1948, when the influence of the wage policy was evident in the decision to give no increase in the starting-point of the basic scale of certificated assistant teachers, which remained at £300 a year. Annual increments also remained at £15 a year, but two extra increments were added to the scale so that the previous maximum of £525 now became £555. In 1951



the starting-point was raised substantially to £375, with increments of £18, and a maximum of £630, so that the general increase in teachers' salaries since 1945 was about 25 per cent throughout the scale.

In 1947 the National Association of Local Government Officers had been disappointed by an offer from its employers which included no substantial increase except for junior grades. It appealed to the National Arbitration Tribunal, where its case was heard in January 1948. The only important advances on the offer contained in the tribunal's award were an extra £20 a year for all clerical staff, and an increase of the maximum salary in the scale of the general division. However, local-government staff were fortunate in that the award was issued before the publication of the White Paper on 4 February. Had the award been delayed they might have received even less. Negotiations were not resumed until 1949. In May of that year, two new scales were added above the previous maximum of £760, leading to a new maximum of £1,000. This decision was of no immediate benefit to the great majority of local-government officers, but many of them could hope to gain through the recommendation that there should be 'national gradings for some of the A[dministrative] P[rofessional] and T[echnical] staff previously not graded'. The staff side 'saw in them the key to better grading for many and, through them, to a general uplift'.<sup>215</sup> Their secretary, Warren, told the delegates at the union's conference in June that anything other than a policy of 'limited objectives' might destroy these opportunities. However, the delegates to the 1950 conference showed their discontent with 'severe restraint' by defeating their executive's recommendation that the policy of limited objectives be maintained, and substituting a recommendation for 'a campaign for an all-round increase', and for the establishment of a reserve fund by setting aside £50,000 a year to build up a war chest.<sup>216</sup> The claim for a general increase was calculated on the basis of a 19 per cent rise in the cost of living which they asserted had accumulated since the last general pay increase in 1946. But the employers' side refused to consider any change in the cost of living that had occurred before the award by the National Arbitration Tribunal in 1948.

Negotiations ran on into 1951, and the employers were clearly influenced by the rapid rise in the figures of wage and salary settlements and awards in other industries and services. They may also have been affected by the publicity campaign launched by the union which led to the publication of the union's case in 'more than 300 newspapers and periodicals'.<sup>217</sup> Agreement was reached on an increase of about 15 per cent for the main group of staff, those in the general division, who

<sup>215</sup> Spoor, 253.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* 254-5.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* 258-9.

constituted about half the total number of local-government officers. Most of the remainder received increases of between 10 and 12 per cent. There was to be no increase for any officer whose salary exceeded £1,000, but there were not many of them.

Commenting on the effect of wage policy in the National Health Service, the *Health Services Journal* wrote in April 1948:

we will be justified in seeking wage increases in regard to some of the lower-paid groups in the Health Service on the grounds that present wage rates are below a reasonable subsistence level, and in order to attract man-power and woman-power to a seriously understaffed national health service. . . . [More-over] by reducing the incidence and duration of sickness, whether in mind or body, surely we are increasing the productive capacity of the nation.

No other industry or service could advance such grounds for special treatment under the wage policy.

A claim on behalf of student nurses had been submitted in September 1947, and a year later the same journal reported

a revolt of student nurses which culminated in wholesale resignation threats and a great demonstration in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park last month . . . Even before our delegate conference . . . last September unanimously denounced a £5 a week minimum for student nurses we had been trying for nearly two years to get the Rushcliffe Committee to face up to this issue. At every step we were opposed by the Victorian snobbishness which considers status and tradition more important than the rate for the job.

There was a special problem in relation to the salaries of student nurses. The comprehensive system created by the National Insurance Act of 1946 was due to come into operation in July 1948 with sharply increased rates of contribution from insured persons. Both the nurses' trade unions and the management of the new National Health Service realized that these rates would impose hardship on student nurses with their modest salaries (£70 a year for a first-year student in 1948). Many nurses lived in their hospitals. Their emoluments were judged to be worth £75 a year. Those who lived out received an allowance of £55 in addition to their salaries; the difference between the £75 'emoluments' and the £55 allowance being an assessment of the value of the meals that the nurses who lived out ate in their hospitals.

By 1948 the salaries and emoluments of nurses were no longer decided by the Rushcliffe Committee,<sup>218</sup> which had been absorbed by a

<sup>218</sup> During the war the government had found itself heavily involved in hospital finances and effectively paying nurses' salaries. The Minister of Health therefore appointed two committees representative of the employing authorities and of the nurses' associations and unions to settle salaries, one for England and Wales, and one for Scotland. Lord Rushcliffe was chairman of the committee for England and Wales.

system of negotiating committees for the settlement of pay and conditions throughout the health service. At the apex was a general council dealing with issues affecting the whole service. Most matters for negotiation, however, affected particular groups of staff, and were handled by 'functional councils', including the council for nurses and midwives which replaced the Rushcliffe Committee. Like its predecessor, this council's staff side consisted of a mixture of staff associations<sup>219</sup> and trade unions—twelve organizations in all. Of the forty-one seats allotted to the staff side, two staff associations, the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives, occupied twelve and six seats respectively. Three trade unions, the Confederation of Health Service Employees, the National and Local Government Officers' Association, and the National Union of Public Employees' held four seats each. The remaining eleven seats were distributed among eleven other representative organizations, some of them trade unions and some professional associations.

The differences between the two types of organization came to the surface when the professional associations were ready to accept an offer from the management side that the unions had decided to reject. In the end a small joint committee drawn from both sides of the council agreed temporary increases, and went on to fix the salaries of student nurses. From January 1949 the salary of a first-year general nursing student was to be £200 a year, and that of a first-year mental nursing student £220 a year; with a deduction of £100 a year for board and lodging from the salaries of those living in. Dependants' allowances were also provided. The council then turned to the salaries of qualified nurses. It was agreed that they also should receive an inclusive salary subject to deductions for those living in. The minimum salary of a female staff nurse was increased from £140 with emoluments valued at £100 to a minimum of £315 with a deduction of £120 for board and lodging for those living in. Annual increments were also augmented so that the maximum of the scale became £415, and it was to be reached in a shorter period than before.

Negotiations for the remaining grades dragged on through 1949, and there were still a number of them left in January 1950 when the government's plea for 'severe restraint' was accepted by Congress. The management side agreed to make an offer for nursing assistants, but

<sup>219</sup> 'Most professional associations in the Health Service are registered as companies. . . . Under Section 5 of the Trade Union Act 1871, trade unions are debarred from registration under the Companies Act. Where the word "limited" is omitted from the title of a company by consent, as is the case with most professional associations which are registered as companies, a proviso is normally included in the Memorandum of Association' to prevent the association from imposing 'any regulation or restriction which, if an object of the Association, would make it a trade union' (H. A. Clegg and T. E. Chester, *Wage Policy and the Health Service* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 111).



proposed that the salaries of the remaining qualified grades be left aside for the time being. The staff side refused, and the dispute was referred to the National Arbitration Tribunal. In April the tribunal awarded an addition of £40 a year to the health visitors' scale throughout, and proposed that the parties settle the salaries of the remaining grades in relation to their award. It took the council until September 1952 to complete the task.

Meanwhile the eight other functional councils were busy settling pay for the rest of the health-service staff. The agreements of the Ancillary Staffs Council, which was concerned mainly with wage-earners, followed the agreements reached for local-authority manual workers; and those of the Administrative and Clerical Staffs' Council were guided by the agreements reached for their local-authority counterparts. There were two councils for professional and technical staffs (one mainly for technicians and one mainly for professionals), a pharmaceutical council, a medical council, an optical council, and a dental council. The medical council was to work through three committees: one for consultants and specialists working full-time or part-time in hospitals, where representatives of the employing authorities met a joint body of the Royal Colleges, the Royal Scottish Colleges, and the Central Consultants' and Specialists' Committee; one for doctors employed in the public health services, in which the representatives of the local-authority associations met the Public Health Committee of the British Medical Association; and a third for general practitioners in which, at the insistence of the British Medical Association, their General Medical Services Committee dealt directly with representatives of the Ministry of Health and the Department of Health for Scotland, with two 'observers' from the local-authority associations.

The issue of the pay of medical practitioners had come to the fore soon after the war, when the government appointed an Inter-departmental Committee on the Remuneration of Medical Practitioners, chaired by Sir Will Spens, which made recommendations as to what the incomes of practitioners should have been in 1939 based on information concerning their incomes in 1936-8. It said that it 'did not feel qualified as a Committee to form an opinion on what adjustment of immediately pre-war incomes was necessary to produce corresponding incomes today'. It was confident that the proportion of practitioners who were able to reach a net income of £1,300 or over in 1939 was 'too low' and wanted to increase from 36.5 per cent the proportion of incomes over £1,300, and also said that 'it should be possible for practitioners of exceptional skill and ability to reach a net income of at least £2,500'.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>220</sup> Cmd. 6180 (May 1946).



In 1948 another committee chaired by Spens made recommendations for the pay of consultants and specialists on a similar basis.<sup>221</sup>

These two reports provided the basis of capitation fees and medical salaries in the National Health Service when it came into operation in 1948, but they left open the question of 'betterment'—the appropriate adjustment to take account of rising prices and increases in other professional salaries since 1939. Offers from the Minister of Health were rejected by the British Medical Association until in August 1951 the then minister, Hilary Marquand, agreed to another reference to an independent arbitrator provided the General Medical Services Committee would commit itself to accept his findings. They did so, and Mr Justice Danckwerts was given the job. He had not yet made his award when the Labour government resigned. When he did so early in 1952, *Medical World*, the journal of the Medical Practitioners' Union, described it as 'a successful outcome', and later published estimates that its effect would be to increase the incomes of practitioners by a 'rough average' of £500 a year with 'arrears of a lump sum of £2,000'.<sup>222</sup>

Arbitration played an important part also in the settlement of pay within other branches of the service. 'Of the 53 "major" settlements in the health service from 1948 to 1955, twenty-six were the result of decisions of the Industrial Court, the National Arbitration Tribunal and the Industrial Disputes Tribunal.'<sup>223</sup> The consequence of the White Paper on *Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices*<sup>224</sup> for the Civil Service was that 'claims for adjustments in civil service scales, no matter how well substantiated, were for the most part rejected both by the Official Side and the Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal'.<sup>225</sup> The government's view was that it could not expect other employers to respect its policy if it did not apply it to its own employees. The claim put in by the Civil Service Clerical Association in 1949 was one of those rejected. The following year the association resubmitted the claim, but altered its case for it. It now pointed out that the White Paper had ruled that a pay-claim 'must be considered on its national merits and not on the basis of maintaining a former relativity between different occupations or industries'. Despite this ruling, the Treasury was arguing that Civil Service rates should not be increased because they compared favourably with rates paid outside. On the contrary, argued the union spokesman, the rates quoted by the Treasury as being paid by large-scale private employers were 'derived directly from civil service practice'.<sup>226</sup> The case went to the Civil

<sup>221</sup> Cmd. 7420 (May 1948).

<sup>222</sup> The Medical Practitioners' Union was, unlike the British Medical Association, legally a trade union, and affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. It had no negotiating rights in the Health Service, but some of its members served on the General Medical Services Committee.

<sup>223</sup> Clegg and Chester, 91.

<sup>225</sup> Humphreys, 209-10.

<sup>224</sup> See p. 366.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* 210.

Service Arbitration Tribunal, where the Treasury defended the use of the 'Tomlin formula' of comparisons with outside rates of pay, but the tribunal awarded substantial increases. As the case was heard in December 1950, when the policy was manifestly collapsing, the tribunal may have been influenced by current events as much as by the arguments of the staff side.

The Institution of Professional Civil Servants was then pursuing a similar claim. The date for the hearing had been fixed for February 1951, but the Treasury asked for a postponement to allow them to make an offer, which led to a proposal for increases. The institution was ready to accept the rates offered for some grades. However, it insisted that the rate for technicians must go to the tribunal whose award was higher than the offer.<sup>227</sup>

### *The Fall of the Labour Government*

Over the autumn and winter of 1950-1 the Labour government was plagued by other problems besides the collapse of its incomes policy. The worst of them appeared in June 1950 when the communist government of North Korea invaded non-communist South Korea. Led by the United States, with strong support from Britain, the United Nations Security Council decided to support South Korea—with Yugoslavia dissenting and the Soviet member absent. Britain backed her vote by sending troops from Hong Kong to support the Americans in South Korea, followed by reinforcements from Britain. This entailed a substantial increase in armaments expenditure, the money for which had to be found by Gaitskell, who succeeded the ailing Cripps as Chancellor of the Exchequer in October.

A second problem was the illegality of strikes under Order 1305. Since 1946 the annual number of strikes had been below those of 1944 and 1945, and the number of working days recorded as lost through them fell each year (apart from 1947) to 1950, when the figure was 1,389,000. The dock strike of 1945, with a loss of 1.1 million working days, remained by far the largest single strike of the post-war years. Since then other strikes had attracted attention, perhaps the most notable being the dock strikes in London, Liverpool, and Avonmouth in 1949 after British Communists had persuaded the dockers that the grievances of the Communist-dominated Canadian Seamen's Union deserved their support. They cost altogether about 400,000 working days. The penalties against workers taking part in strikes in contravention of Order 1305, as almost all strikes were, had not been used

<sup>227</sup> Mortimer and Ellis, 155-7.

since the early years of the war; but instances such as this and the power-station strikes later that year, for which the blame was widely attributed to the Communist-led Electrical Trades Union, caused members of the government to wonder whether they should not be used again. Finally the Attorney-General, Hartley Shawcross, decided to take action against ten men, 'not all of them Communists by any means',<sup>228</sup> as responsible for a strike in a North Thames gasworks towards the end of 1950. Each of them was sentenced to a month's imprisonment, reduced on appeal to a £50 fine.<sup>229</sup> As the General Council commented in its next report to Congress:

Breaches of the Order could lead to the imposition of penalties by the Courts. This was the position throughout and there were a hundred such prosecutions in the early years of the war. It came, however, as a shock to many to be reminded of this. . . . [T]his reminder that strikers could be punished by law caused grave misgivings, and largely influenced the General Council in reaching the decision that the time had arrived when the Order should be substantially modified.<sup>230</sup>

As yet, however, the government did not take the same view. The Cabinet considered the matter on 15 January 1951 and decided that the order should remain in force. Shawcross used it again to prosecute seven London dockers, who were fined in February, with the consequence that there were strikes of their colleagues in London, the Mersey ports, and the Clyde.

By that time Isaacs was no longer Minister of Labour, having been replaced by Bevan in January. The latter had been humiliated by being passed over in favour of Gaitskell for the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, but it is not easy to find a convincing reason for his acceptance of this new post, where he was almost immediately embarrassed by having to share with Shawcross the responsibility for prosecuting strikers. Nor was it Bevan who was able to claim the credit for the amendment of Order 1305 to make it more acceptable to trade unions. That was the achievement of his successor, for Bevan resigned from the government in March, and was succeeded by Alfred Robens, a Co-operative Party representative in Parliament. He proposed to get rid of the risk to the government's popularity and to its trade union support, which might result from the prosecution of strikers, by removing the prohibition of strikes contained in the order; but he retained the advantage of being able to avoid threatened strikes by referring disputes

<sup>228</sup> Morgan, 437.

<sup>229</sup> For good measure, the ten men were also prosecuted for breach of contract under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875, section 4, which instituted special penalties for 'breach of contract by persons employed in the supply of gas and water'.

<sup>230</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1951), 232-3.

to a new 'Industrial Disputes Tribunal' which was empowered to issue binding awards. This was done, with the approval of the National Joint Advisory Council, by means of a new order, No. 1376, which forbade reference to the tribunal unless the minister was satisfied that the appropriate voluntary negotiating arrangements had been fully used, including reference to a domestic arbitration tribunal or the Industrial Court where that was provided for in the agreement.

Bevan's resignation followed another change in one of the most senior ministerial posts: the Foreign Office. Bevan was seriously ill, and in March Attlee moved him to the post of Lord Privy Seal, replacing him as Foreign Secretary by Morrison. Within a month Bevan was dead. Being passed over for another senior post 'added immensely to Bevan's sense of personal humiliation'. In addition his 'general discontent with the government's foreign and defence policy in the winter of 1950-1 was well-known'.<sup>231</sup> Then came Gaitskell's proposal to introduce charges for dental and optical treatment under the Health Service as one contribution to finance the escalating military expenditure due to the war in the Far East. The charges were accepted by the Cabinet over the opposition of Bevan and Harold Wilson. Both Bevan and Gaitskell threatened to resign over the issue, the one if it was not dropped, the other if it was. Gaitskell introduced his budget, including the charges, on 10 April. Frantic negotiations followed to find a way out, without success. On 22 April Bevan resigned, followed by Wilson the next day. They were also joined by a junior minister, John Freeman. On 25 April the General Council, by 13 votes to 6, recorded its 'regret . . . that certain Ministers have felt it necessary to resign their responsibilities at a time when the Government is beset by serious international problems and is under heavy opposition attack in Parliament'. It may be noted that the defence programme that Gaitskell was trying to finance could not be carried out, primarily for lack of materials. The money could not be spent, and the programme was cut back by the incoming Conservative government the following winter. The war in the Far East, which had threatened to escalate when the American commander, MacArthur, drove through North Korea almost to the Chinese border, entered a period of stalemate after Truman dismissed his general in April 1951. However, this welcome respite was to some extent offset by troubles in Iran, Egypt, and Central Africa, and controversy over the proposal for German rearmament in response to the threat from Russia.

Following the dock strikes over arrests under Order 1305 at the beginning of the year, and a protracted strike of 2,000 aircraft workers in the north of Ireland from January to March over the dismissal of shop

<sup>231</sup> Morgan, 443.



stewards for alleged breaches of discipline, there was a stoppage of 2,000 electricians in April, protesting against the dismissal of one of their members for refusing to work with a mate who was a member of another union, in which 60,000 working days were lost. In May 65,000 days were lost in road haulage due to a strike over the extension of road patrols. In June tally clerks struck in the London docks over further recruitment at a time when there were, they said, already too many men on the register, with a loss of 70,000 working days; and, also in June, coalminers in Glamorgan struck over proposed transfers due to the closure of some workings, with a loss of 60,000 working days. It is notable that none of these strikes was over pay, and that the remainder of the year was remarkably free of strikes.

Meanwhile the tide of wage increases continued to roll in. In July employees in the wool industry received their second rise of the year, followed by workers in the footwear industry in August. In September railway employees and cotton operatives had their second increase, as did ancillary staff in the Health Service in October. In November it was the turn of coal, furniture-making, gas supply, printing, and textile finishing to come back for more, and get it.

On 6 February Gaitskell and Bevan had met the General Council's Special Committee on the Economic Situation to discuss the consequences of the ending of wage restraint. Bevan acknowledged that 'the previous policy had been carried to the point where the leaders were in danger of losing their authority over the rank and file', and assured them that the government 'had no intention of asking the General Council to associate themselves with a wage-freeze policy'. But, he asked,

would it be possible . . . for the national and social repercussions of particular claims to be considered during wage-negotiations? The Government . . . did not want this to be at the level of the National Arbitration Tribunal, as it would tend to undermine the Tribunal's authority; nor did they want to see claims referred automatically to compulsory arbitration.

The answer came from George Woodcock, the Council's assistant secretary, who said that the Council

had in fact sought to do something very similar to what the Minister was suggesting. Their policy of persuading trade unionists to take into account the national interest and their own long-term welfare when formulating their claims had had a considerable influence, but it had now clearly been rejected, and there could be no question of going back to it.

Tewson supported his subordinate, and said it was now for the government to take action 'both through the Budget and reducing profit margins'. Bevan then asked the committee 'whether there was a danger of a second round of wage-claims immediately'. Lincoln Evans, of the

Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, and Alan Birch, of the Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers, told him that there was such a danger. It was agreed that this was 'a preliminary discussion', but it was, in fact, the last recorded meeting of the special committee.

During the summer of 1951 Britain's economic position deteriorated sharply. Because of a rise in the volume of imports and still more because of the rise in the price of imports, the balance of payments worsened dramatically. The government responded by scaling down the rearmament programme, and cutting rations of butter, bacon, and cheese. Gaitskell proposed a limitation on dividends for three years, perhaps with an eye on the meeting of the Trades Union Congress in September, where he was invited to address the delegates. He told them that

there is an especial need for moderation, during the next few months. There are now, I think, some signs of world inflation tailing off. We know that increased prices now working their way through the economic system are likely to put up the cost of living index by two or three points between now and the end of the year. But raw material prices have begun to fall. . . . Yet internally we could on our own easily set off a new inflationary process.

He was not 'talking about a wage freeze or rigid restraint', and had no 'simple solution' as to how moderation should be given 'proper effect', but 'we in the Government are at your disposal for further discussion on this most vital problem. The solution to it, I am sure, is essential if we are to have full employment without inflation'.<sup>232</sup> The General Council considered the same problem on 25 July, 'when the opinion was expressed that to prevent further inflationary tendencies the Government should place more controls on prices, increase subsidies and take action on limiting profits'. Two days later this programme was elaborated by Tom Williamson in a resolution submitted to Congress by his union, the General and Municipal Workers, urging the government to

- (a) Exercise a wider and more effective control of the prices of home-produced goods, and re-introduce other necessary controls;
- (b) re-consider its attitude towards the limitation of subsidies;
- (c) pursue without delay an investigation into the methods and costs of distribution;
- (d) apply more effective control of profits and strictly limit bonus issues; and
- (e) remove Purchase Tax from household necessities.<sup>233</sup>

This resolution was passed without the need for a vote. Clearly Congress and, significantly, even the moderate and loyal General and

<sup>232</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1951), 369-70.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.* 515.

Municipal Workers were not in a mood to consider a return to wage restraint of any kind, in any shape or form, as was confirmed later that day when a spokesman for the Supervisory Staffs, Executives and Technicians proposed that Congress, 'recognising the inconsistency of supporting a planned economy on the one hand and insisting on an unplanned wages sector on the other, calls upon the General Council to examine the possibilities of formulating a planned wages policy and to place its findings before the 1952 Congress'.<sup>234</sup> The resolution was rejected without a vote.

Congress finished its business on 7 September. On the 19th Attlee told his Cabinet that he had decided to ask for a dissolution. At the beginning of the election campaign the polls reported the Conservatives well ahead of the Labour Party. Whether or not because of Morrison's suggestion that Churchill might use force to settle Britain's problems with Iran and Egypt, graphically illustrated by the *Daily Mirror* cartoon entitled 'Whose Finger on the Trigger?', the Labour Party recovered handsomely by polling-day, when it received 13,948,000 votes, marginally more than the Conservatives; but the Conservatives had the advantage in seats, with 321 against 295 for Labour, and only six for the Liberals. Churchill became Prime Minister again.

On 31 October the General Council approved a statement for publication:

It is our long standing practice to seek to work amicably with whatever Government is in power and through consultation jointly with Ministers and the other side of industry to find practical solutions to the social and economic problems facing this country. There need be no doubt, therefore of the attitude of the T.U.C. towards the new Government.

On our part we shall continue to examine every question in the light of its industrial and economic implications. . . . we shall retain our right to disagree and publicly to oppose the Government where we think it is necessary to do so.

Probably more than one member of the General Council sighed with relief when he realized that the new government was in no position to exert on them the kind of pressures that the Labour government had done.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. 526.

## The Years 1889–1951 in Retrospect

### *Union Growth*

British unions grew very substantially in membership over the years 1889 to 1951, but their growth was by no means continuous. By and large there were two periods of growth: 1889–1920 and 1934–51, separated by a period of marked decline from 1921 to 1933. From an estimated 750,000 members in 1888 the total rose to over 8 million by 1920, and then fell back to 4.35 million by 1933. Growth then resumed, and by 1951 membership had reached 9.29 million. There were also relatively small deviations from these general trends. Membership fell in 1893–5, 1901–4, and 1907–9; rose in 1923–4 and 1928–9; and fell again in 1945, 1949, and 1950; but all these deviations from the general trends were marginal.

Total trade union membership, however, is not necessarily the most appropriate measure of union strength, which may be judged more effectively by union density—the proportion of potential members who have been recruited into the unions. Since one of the main objectives of a trade union is to be able to put pressure on an employer or a group of employers, a union with 90 per cent of a given labour force, whether of a factory, an enterprise, or an industry, is manifestly stronger than a union with only half of a labour force of double that size. Estimated trade union density in Britain was about 5 per cent in 1888, and the more reliable figure for 1892 is 11.1 per cent. By 1951 it had risen to 44.7 per cent. Trade unions were therefore much stronger in Britain in 1951 than they had been in 1892, and even more so than in 1888.

The increase in trade union density, however, was not the only factor in the growth of trade union membership over those years, for the labour force had also increased, from 13.25 million in 1892 to 20.27 million in 1951. Other factors were also at work. At the beginning of the twentieth century relatively few women workers outside the cotton industry belonged to trade unions. In 1896, the first year for which separate figures for men and women are available, union density among women workers was 2.7 per cent, compared with 14.0 per cent for men. By 1951 the figure for women had risen to 24.7 per cent compared with 55.2 per cent for men. Over that period the propensity of women to join trade unions had risen from just under one-fifth of that of men to not far short



of a half. There is a similar, but less marked, contrast between manual workers and white-collar workers. Figures for comparisons between white-collar and manual union membership are available for census years only. In 1911 white-collar union density was 11.6 per cent, and manual density was 20.0 per cent. By 1951 the white-collar figure had risen to 31.3 per cent, whereas the manual figure then stood at 49.1 per cent. Thus the increase in union density among white-collar workers over that period had been almost threefold compared with an increase of no more than 250 per cent among manual workers.

The main explanation for the contrasting rates of growth of union density is that, in a period when trade union membership was rising generally, there was more room for growth among women and white-collar workers. Indeed, even by 1911 there were industries, most of them exclusively male preserves, and most with a high proportion of manual workers, where union density was well on the way towards saturation point, so that a further increase in union membership would have to come mainly from an increase in employment. Outstanding among them were sea transport, and ports and inland waterways, both with union densities of well over 80 per cent; and coalmining was not far behind, with just short of 75 per cent. If it was possible to abstract the figure for union density in shipbuilding at that time from the overall total for the metals, engineering, and shipbuilding group of industries, it is not unlikely that it would rank along with those three industries, and the same was perhaps true of iron and steel. By 1951 the list of industries in which trade union density was approaching saturation point was much longer. At this time road transport came highest, with 93.0 per cent. Next came ports and inland waterways, with 90.2 per cent, and coalmining with 90.1 per cent; but sea transport had dropped behind, at 80.4 per cent. Two other industries—railways, and posts and telecommunications—topped 80 per cent; and printing and publishing, cotton, footwear, and gas supply all exceeded 70 per cent. Most of these industries employ few women, but cotton and footwear employ very substantial proportions of women workers, showing that a low figure for union density is not an inevitable feature of female employment.

Another important influence on union membership in particular industries is the closed shop, whereby the union, either by its own fiat or by agreement with an employer, or with an organization of employers, requires employees to be members of one or more unions in order to obtain or keep a job. This institution is especially common in craft trades, but by no means confined to them. The index of the first volume of this *History*, which deals with the years 1889–1910, contains references to the closed shop in no less than a dozen industries, a third of them relating to the docks and shipping, in both of which trade unions

experienced unusual difficulty in maintaining their membership. In the docks the problem was casual employment, customarily by the half-day, which, in the absence of a closed shop, demanded a large staff of union officers and the exercise by them of great vigilance to ensure that only union members were taken on. In shipping, employment was usually for the period of a voyage, and unless the union could contact seamen when they were signed on, and again when they were paid off in order to collect their union dues, they would lack members and income. In practice it was extremely difficult to maintain an effective union in either industry without the co-operation of the employers, or at least of the officials who took on workers—the ships' officers and the dock foremen who took on gangs at the dock gates. However, such informal arrangements might prove unreliable, and it was not until the unions were able to gain the co-operation of the employers' associations that dependable 'union security' was achieved. Following the widespread dock strikes in the summer of 1911 the London port employers agreed that men should be taken on outside the dock gates to allow the unions to enforce an inspection of union cards, and the Liverpool employers undertook to allow the men to display their union 'buttons' at the stands where they were taken on and not to discriminate in favour of non-unionists.<sup>1</sup> Six years later, the Shipping Federation tried to remedy a wartime labour shortage by abandoning its objection to dealing with trade unions of seamen and ships' officers and establishing a National Maritime Board to negotiate pay and conditions. This body adopted a scheme of joint supply of crews through district joint boards which enabled the union to insist on the employment of union members only.<sup>2</sup>

Although extreme cases, these instances illustrate how much union growth depended on the development of collective bargaining, and therefore on the goodwill and co-operation of employers and their associations. In other industries where the unions did not have general closed-shop agreements, or arrangements that facilitated union action to maintain 'one hundred per cent membership', they relied on their ability to achieve acceptable standards of pay and hours of work, and acceptable standards of treatment at the work-place, in order to recruit and retain their members. That such aids to union strength can be as effective as the closed shop is demonstrated by Lord McCarthy in *The Closed Shop in Britain* where he writes of the footwear industry that 'national agreements are universally observed, and unionisation is above the 90 per cent level. The remarkable thing is that all this has been achieved without the use of . . . the closed shop'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii. 35-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 164.

<sup>3</sup> W. E. McCarthy, *The Closed Shop in Britain*, 173.

*Collective Bargaining*

Volume 1 of this history asserted that 'the development of collective bargaining was the outstanding feature of the years 1889-1910'.<sup>4</sup> In 1889 there was only one industry in which the two sides had established by agreement a procedure for handling disputes between them by a process of meetings and discussions. This was cotton-weaving, which was regarded as a separate industry from cotton-spinning. By 1910 it had been joined by building, cotton-spinning, engineering, iron and steel, printing, and shipbuilding. In addition, 'almost every other well-organised industry, except the railways, had evolved its own system of collective bargaining, even if not yet on a fully national basis'.<sup>5</sup> In coalmining the agreement for the 'Federated Area' covered all the English coalfields except for Durham and Northumberland, which had their own well-developed systems of negotiation. All this extension of collective bargaining was due to the growth of employers' organizations as well as to the extension of trade union coverage.

Meanwhile cotton-weaving had advanced a stage further in the development of collective bargaining by negotiating a pay agreement that was to apply throughout the industry. This was a uniform list of piece-prices for 'plain weaving'—'the main sector of the trade'. The majority of weavers gained an increase in their earnings from the application of the list, following which the union's membership rose from 49,000 to 56,000.<sup>6</sup> These developments were fostered by the widespread acceptance by public opinion in Britain of **collective bargaining as the appropriate method of handling industrial relations**—an opinion that had been authoritatively expressed by the Royal Commission on Labour in its report, published in 1894, which asserted that 'mixed boards' of representatives of employers and trade unions were 'most successful . . . where organisations on either side are strongest and most complete'. It hoped that 'the present rapid extension' of such boards 'will continue'.<sup>7</sup> The commission also recommended an extension of the information and advisory services of the Labour Department of the Board of Trade, and that the department be empowered to appoint an arbitrator on application from the parties. Subsequently the Board of Trade, with first Lloyd George, and then Winston Churchill, as its president, intervened in industrial relations to encourage and guide collective bargaining more energetically than the limited proposals of the Royal Commission appeared to warrant.

In 1910 the Labour Department made an estimate of the number of workers whose conditions of labour were 'specifically regulated' by

<sup>4</sup> Clegg, *History*, i. 471.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 117-18.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted *ibid.* 485.



industry-wide or district collective agreements, and came up with the figure of 2.4 million. Since its estimate excluded local-authority employees and also employees covered by an agreement with a single firm, the total coverage of collective agreements at that time 'must have been somewhere near three million workers'.<sup>8</sup>

In the years 1899-1907 it might have appeared that these developments in collective bargaining had brought industrial peace. In 1889 and again in 1890, the years of the 'new unionism', the number of stoppages of work due to industrial disputes exceeded 1,000, a figure not reached again until 1913. The number of working days lost due to industrial disputes, which exceeded 17 million in 1891, 30 million in 1892, 10 million in 1897, and 15 million in 1898, did not rise above 5 million again until 1908. In that year, however, the total was over 10 million, and over 9 million in 1910, more than 10 million again in 1911, and over 40 million in 1912. By then the notion that the development of collective bargaining would bring industrial peace appeared to be comprehensively disproved. What collective bargaining could ensure was that, where its writ ran, issues in dispute would be discussed by the parties to the agreement, and in the end, perhaps after a strike or a lockout, settled by discussion between them.

Further encouragement of the extension of collective bargaining came from the Trade Boards Act 1909, providing for statutory boards of union and employer representatives along with independent members, to be established in industries in which wages were 'exceptionally low'.<sup>9</sup> It was hoped that these boards would not only raise the level of pay in those industries to which the Act was applied, but also provide a stepping-stone to independent voluntary collective-bargaining arrangements. Seven such boards had been established by the time war broke out in 1914.

During the war collective bargaining was further encouraged by the Ministry of Munitions and the Committee on Production, which was set up 'to ensure that the productive power of the employees . . . working for Government purposes shall be made fully available so as to meet the needs of the nation',<sup>10</sup> and which promoted industry-wide wage-bargaining in chemicals, engineering, road transport, shipbuilding, wool, and other industries. Government control brought industry-wide wage settlements in the railways and coalmining. An Agricultural Wages Board was set up on the model of the trade boards, although under a separate statute. Collective bargaining for government employees was encouraged by the establishment of an arbitration board to deal with

<sup>8</sup> Clegg, *History*, ii, 548.

<sup>9</sup> Trade Boards Act 1909, section 1(2).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Clegg, *History*, ii, 121.



their pay-claims. After the war a number of these wartime arrangements were converted into permanent bargaining bodies, some of them as joint industrial councils following the recommendations of the Whitley Committee charged with 'securing a permanent improvement in the relations between employers and workmen'. The committee proposed that every industry should have some form of joint body to deal with industrial relations, preferably voluntary, but otherwise statutory.

During the years following the economic crisis of 1921 there were a number of defections from collective bargaining at industry level, including coalmining and wool, which reverted to local bargaining, and the Agricultural Wages Board was replaced by county committees. In addition, an unknown number of firms ceased to be subject to collective agreements by withdrawing from their federations or associations. In volume ii it was estimated that the number of employees covered by voluntary collective bargaining arrangements in 1933 was 'not much more than seven million', but that, if trade boards and county agricultural committees were included, the total might be put at 'nearly nine million', roughly three times the figure for 1910, but probably well short of the total for 1920.<sup>11</sup>

Expansion recommenced with economic recovery in 1934. Over the next few years collective-bargaining arrangements were established or re-established in the private sector of retail distribution, for private bus operators, for road haulage, and, following the recommendations of the Athlone Committee, for private hospital services. In addition, with rising prosperity and increasing employment, the number of workers covered by the collective-bargaining arrangements that had existed in 1933 must have increased substantially. In the absence of hard evidence, it seems plausible to guess that the coverage of collective agreements rose over those years in step with union membership, although the total coverage of collective agreements would, as always, have greatly exceeded the number of union members, since agreements also covered many non-members. As union membership rose from 4.35 million in 1933 to 6.20 million in 1939, or by more than 40 per cent, this assumption would indicate that the number of workers covered by collective agreements, including statutory wage-fixing bodies, had increased to something like 12.5 million. By 1951 total trade union membership had risen to 9.27 million, almost half again since 1939, with a union density of 44.7 per cent, which was not surpassed until 1970. However, it cannot be assumed that the coverage of collective agreements continued to increase in step with union membership after 1939. By the outbreak of war there were few industries with no bargaining arrangements for their

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 549.

manual workers, and most large industries had also signed agreements that applied at least to the lower grades of their white-collar employees. Further expansion of union membership had to come mainly from increasing the density of union membership in areas where collective bargaining was already established.

### *Union Structure*

In 1951 there were 186 unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. The majority of them were small—ninety-two of them had fewer than 5,000 members. At the other extreme were the Transport and General Workers with 1.24 million members, the General and Municipal Workers with 784,000 members, the Engineers with 716,000, the Miners with 602,000, and the Railwaymen with 392,000. Between them these five unions accounted for well over a third of all British trade-unionists.

Most of the smaller unions recruited workers in a single industry, for example the Hosiery Workers, and the Tobacco Workers. Many of them organized a particular class of workers in a single industry in one district, such as the Bradford and District Wardressers' Association, or the Sheffield Amalgamated Union of File Trades. At the other extreme the two general unions recognized few boundaries to their expansion, except where an existing powerful union claimed that it was already established. In 1926 the Engineers changed their rules to allow themselves to recruit semi-skilled and unskilled engineering workers. They already catered for the skilled engineers who were employed on maintenance work in almost every other industry, so that their industrial coverage was almost as wide as that of either of the two general unions.

It may be readily appreciated that trade-unionists from overseas found British trade union structure difficult to understand, with its combination of a mass of small unions and a few amorphous giants. Few other trade union movements had so many small unions. The Australian Workers' Union and the Teamsters in the United States could be classified as general unions, but no other country had so large a proportion of its trade-unionists in general unions. On the other hand some overseas trade union movements had structural complications that were not found in Britain, such as separate socialist and Catholic unions competing with each other.

There have been two notable attempts to reform British trade union structure. The first of them came in the years before the 1914-18 war. Most of its advocates were syndicalists or industrial-unionists who held that trade unions would be more effective in pursuing better conditions for their members in capitalist societies if they were organized on the

basis of one union for each industry; and that organization on those lines would be essential if unions were to take over the running of their industries in the socialist society that they hoped to see established. A number of schemes were floated for reorganizing trade unions in one industry or another on industrial lines, but the only achievement was the unification of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the General Railway Workers Union, and the United Pointsmen and Signalmen into the National Union of Railwaymen, although the enthusiasts for industrial-unionism were sadly disappointed when the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen held aloof from the merger.

The second attempt came in 1924, when Congress resolved to ask its General Council to draw up 'a scheme for organisation by industry', and also a scheme to secure 'unity of action' without actually merging existing unions. The Council asked its new assistant general secretary, Walter Citrine, to undertake the task. His report, presented to Congress in 1925, offered a detailed analysis of types of union structure, coming down in favour of federal arrangements between unions as most likely to achieve unity of action. Over the next two years detailed questionnaires were circulated to the unions. The replies were analysed, and 'joint working arrangements between unions' were substituted for federation as the most promising means to make progress. In 1929 Congress was informed that talks were in progress on such arrangements in five of the seventeen industrial groups into which affiliated unions were allocated for electoral purposes, whereas no progress had been made in eleven of the remaining groups. A federation, however, had been formed of some, but not all, unions in the glass trades.

There the matter rested until 1943 when Congress instructed the General Council to undertake another review of union structure, and the task was delegated to its Organization Committee, whose report in 1944 handed the responsibility back to the individual unions which were told that they must themselves 'strive for closer unity and resolutely pursue that end'.<sup>12</sup> However, some progress was made. The Miners' Federation had in 1942 begun devising a scheme to unify its district unions into a single national union. By a series of heroic decisions it cut through the many differences between the districts in their rules, procedures, and contributions, and overcame the vested interests of their officials to win a massive majority in a ballot and bring a unified union into existence at the beginning of 1945. Two years later the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers came into being through a

<sup>12</sup> Trades Union Congress, *Report* (1944), 359.

merger of the Distributive and Allied Workers and the Shop Assistants; although it is debatable whether the outcome was a simplification of union structure. The range of interests of the new union, including workers in the co-operative wholesale factories, was so wide that it might be said to have added a third to the list of general unions rather than constituting an industrial union for the retail trade.

The problems that inevitably arose from competition and disputes between unions in a movement of such complexity and diversity were to some extent mitigated by the membership of nearly all unions of any size, except the Local Government Officers,<sup>13</sup> in the Trades Union Congress, so that they were subject to the machinery of Congress for the settlement of disputes between unions; and if they did not want their problems to be aired in front of Congress's Disputes Committee, they had to settle between themselves.

#### *Union Government and the Work-place*

There was, however, and still is, a problem arising from multi-unionism in Britain, which does not appear to occur in other trade union movements, and which the Trades Union Congress could do little to resolve. This problem is the independence of shop-steward organization in the plant from external trade union control. Where one union alone recruited the employees, or the manual employees, in a plant or on a site, that union might have been expected to exercise fairly effective control over union activities there. The secretary of the union branch might, in a large establishment, be a full-time official of the union. Alternatively he might double in the post of convener of shop stewards. There would almost certainly be a considerable overlap between the membership of the shop stewards' committee and the branch committee, if indeed the one committee did not fulfil both functions. However, where there were a number of unions, the knowledge that the convener was also the branch secretary of one of the unions with members in the plant would not necessarily enhance his authority over the stewards of other unions in dealing with work-place issues. It would not necessarily assist the district officer of his union with responsibility for the plant in his dealings with the affairs of the plant; and it would do nothing to assist the district officers of other unions with members in the plant. In these circumstances the conduct of union business in the plant might depend upon the convener more than upon the full-time officers and district committees of the union. The shop stewards' organization in

<sup>13</sup> The union affiliated to Congress in 1965. By then its title was the National and Local Government Officers' Union.



the plant might develop its own aims which differed from those of the unions to which the stewards belonged; and, in order to achieve those goals, they might adopt methods of which their unions did not approve. Of course there is always the possibility that any union organization outside the plant will have problems in persuading its members inside the plant to accept its guidance; but multi-unionism adds to those problems.

These tensions first revealed themselves on the national plane in the May 1917 strikes in many of the centres of munitions production, which led to the formation of the unofficial Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement, and to the official agreement between the Engineering Employers' Federation and the engineering unions to the appointment of shop stewards by unions to deal with grievances within the plant. This movement, however, had lost its impetus long before the economic depression of 1921 undermined the power of trade unions generally. The strength of the shop stewards' movement had been in the munitions factories and, with the cessation of wartime production and the closure of government factories, many jobs were lost. Prominent shop stewards were in many instances among the first to go, some of them to emerge later as leading figures in the Communist Party or in the Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement. It was not until the mid-thirties that a new and vigorous shop stewards' movement emerged in the Aircraft Shop Stewards' National Council, which organized several strikes and agitated for a separate agreement with the engineering employers for aircraft workers.

However, the main trend in union government in the inter-war years was towards centralization. With the replacement of district agreements on pay and conditions of work by industry agreements, the power of trade union district committees was curtailed; and the disappearance of a number of federal bodies, including the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades, the Transport Workers' Federation, the Federation of General Workers' and the Triple Alliance had furthered the concentration of power in the headquarters of the major unions and in the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. Union amalgamations, especially those that created the Transport and General Workers and the General and Municipal Workers, were further aspects of this centralization. The replacement of the Parliamentary Committee of Congress by a General Council with specific powers to co-ordinate union action completed that trend. The centralization of power in the trade union movement was of vital importance in the handling of the labour problems of the Second World War. From the start the government agreed that there must be full consultation with the unions, and the National Joint Advisory Council was established to provide the

main link between the government and the unions for that purpose. Effective co-operation, however, had to wait until the fall of Chamberlain and the formation of a coalition government under Churchill, with Bevin as Minister of Labour.

Bevin persuaded the National Joint Advisory Council to delegate its business to a Joint Consultative Committee of seven representatives from the General Council with seven employers' representatives, and, under their guidance, there emerged the system of industrial relations that was to play its part in winning the war. There was to be no government control of wages, which was left to the existing machinery of collective bargaining, except that strikes and lockouts were banned and unresolved disputes settled by binding arbitration. The government had already undertaken to hold the prices of staple foods as steady as possible, and although the cost of living rose substantially in 1940, thereafter the United States' policy of Lend-Lease enabled the official cost-of-living index to be held almost stationary for the rest of the war. Negotiations and awards continued to bring wage increases. The index of wage rates rose by a little over 50 per cent during the war years, and earnings by just over 75 per cent; but rising earnings brought large numbers of wage-earners within the scope of income tax, which was deducted from their weekly pay-packets under the system of 'pay-as-you-earn'. The wartime conduct of industrial relations can therefore be accounted a success. It does not follow that there were no disputes. There were disputes, and a number of them led to stoppages. Their number increased substantially compared with the pre-war years, and in 1944, the year of the coalmining strike over the Porter award, the number of working days lost through strikes was the highest since 1932; but it was the only wartime strike that can be said to have seriously hampered the nation's war effort. In particular the handling of the dilution of labour in the engineering industry was more sympathetic and successful than in the First World War.

Effective co-operation between the two sides of industry and the government in handling wartime industrial relations was matched in the work-place by the formation of joint production committees which began in the summer of 1941. As it happened, it was the time when Hitler launched his attack on the Soviet Union, which enabled the British Communist Party, which had up to then been opposed to the war as an 'imperialist war', to lend its enthusiastic efforts to promoting joint production committees. In March 1942 the two sides of the engineering industry signed an agreement providing for the establishment of such committees in federated firms; and this development was given the government's blessing by Beaverbrook and Cripps, successively Ministers of Aircraft Production. It is, of course, impossible to assess the

effect of these committees on the output of munitions, but at least they ensured that the workshop representatives of the trade unions were working towards the same goals as their national leaders on the Joint Consultative Committee, and were not at loggerheads with them, as shop stewards in the First World War had often been with their union leaders.

### *Industrial Action*

During the years covered by the three volumes of this history, there were wide variations in the number of strikes per year, and in the loss of working days due to them. Reasonably accurate figures of stoppages due to industrial disputes are available from 1893 onwards; and Table 4 sets out the annual average of working days lost for each decade from 1893-1902 up to 1933-42, and for the years 1943-51. The table shows a wide variation in strike-proneness over the years; but in fact the variation is far wider than that, if strike-proneness is measured in the number of working days lost per union member, for the number of union members in Britain grew from an average of approximately 1.65 million in 1893-1902 to an average of approximately 8.74 million in 1943-51. Measured by the number of working days lost per union member, therefore, the average strike-proneness of trade union members had fallen from a little under five days a year to about one-fifth of a day a year between the two periods.

The main reasons for this marked contrast are not in doubt. In the years before the First World War and again from 1919 to 1926, most union leaders and their members believed that they were justified in using their industrial power to gain their objectives if it appeared that they were unlikely to attain them in any other way, and it seemed likely that their industrial power would prove effective. By contrast, from 1927 onwards most trade union leaders came to believe that the use of their

TABLE 4. *Working days lost through industrial disputes, 1893-1951*

	Approximate annual average (millions)
1893-1902	8.75
1903-12	8.56
1913-22	20.58
1923-32	20.83
1933-42	2.48
1943-51	1.89

members' industrial power should be avoided at almost any cost—although the danger that the members might take action of their own accord unless concessions were made might be mentioned during the course of negotiations; and in some industries union members were ready enough to take unofficial action for the threat to carry weight. Occasionally, where an employer or an employers' association had breached the accepted rules of industrial ethics so blatantly that no other course seemed open to them, union leaders might themselves threaten an official strike or arrange for a strike ballot to be held, in the hope that the threat of an official stoppage would settle the issue in question. However, the overwhelming majority of strikes were now both unofficial (in the sense that they lacked trade union sanction), and unconstitutional (in the sense that they were in breach of the relevant procedure agreement with the employers); and almost all of them were also brief and confined to a relatively small group of workers, so that relatively few working days were lost.

The years 1927-33 were a period of transition from the one pattern of trade union behaviour in relation to strikes to the other. They included the worst years of industrial depression that the world had ever experienced. Although workers might be provoked into a stoppage by the insistence of their employers on a worsening in their terms of employment which they felt was unjustifiable, the likelihood of preventing the imposition of new terms was remote. The experience also had a powerful effect on the thinking of trade union leaders, and with the centralization of power then taking place in the trade unions their opinions had greater force in union decisions than had the opinions of their predecessors. Thereafter union leaders ruled out the threat of a strike to force government intervention in a dispute, except to secure the intervention of the official conciliation services to bring the employers to the negotiating table, or to refer the dispute to arbitration or to an inquiry. Henceforth their methods of putting pressure on the government were those of any pressure group—publicity and persuasion. These were the methods used with considerable success in dealing with governments after 1933 by Bevin, Citrine, Dukes, and other union leaders. They were also the methods they preferred to use in their dealings with employers. They were fortunate in that the economic tide turned in 1931-2, and that from 1934 onwards rising prosperity brought rising employment and wages; and, if prices rose too, earnings rose even faster.

### *Political Action*

From their beginnings British trade unions saw political action as an



adjunct and not an alternative to industrial action; and since the foundation of the Trades Union Congress in 1868, political action had been one of its special concerns. The foundation of the Labour Party in 1900 did not diminish that concern. In its early years the party was generally seen as the political expression of the trade unions and, when it became one of the two major parties in the country, that did not terminate its role as the chief agency of the unions in their pursuit of their political objectives. Indeed it was then a more effective agency for that purpose than before.

The party secured several ministerial posts and several concessions on policy by joining Lloyd George's wartime coalition government in 1916, but thereafter its influence on its colleagues was modest. The first Labour government in 1924 had little time in which to prove its value to the unions; and the second Labour government ended up in disaster in 1931, but the National government which took its place proved to be much more beneficial to the unions and their members once the worst of the economic crisis was past. Its ministers had few inhibitions about intervening in economic affairs, and were ready to assist industry by means of tariffs and subsidies, which could increase employment as well as profits. They extended support for collective bargaining by making the payment of agreed wages obligatory in cotton-manufacturing and road haulage. They promoted the provision of paid annual holidays by appointing a committee that recommended that such holidays be granted to all employees, and secured the passage of the Holidays with Pay Act 1938, which empowered statutory wage-fixing bodies, such as trade boards, to provide annual holidays in the industries for which they were responsible. The government was also prepared to promote discussions on reducing hours of work, although little was achieved in this respect before the war; to extend statutory regulation of wages by appointing trade boards in the grocery trade; to require that ballots of employees be held where firms proposed to introduce two-shift systems of working; and to amend the law on employers' liability insurance to give employees more satisfactory coverage.

The unions, of course, differed sharply from the foreign policy of the National government, especially in relation to Fascism in Spain and Germany. For a government whose foreign policy their members could wholeheartedly support, they had to wait until the Churchill coalition was formed in 1940. From the point of view of trade-unionists—and not only of them—this was probably the most satisfactory government of the whole period. It had one overriding objective—the defeat of Hitler and his allies—which was shared by almost everyone in the country, apart from a few Mosleyites, a rapidly diminishing number of pacifists, and (temporarily) the members of the Communist Party. Its relatively

egalitarian social and economic policies on the home front were welcomed by the unions and the Labour Party, and, along with full employment, government subsidies to keep the cost of living stable, and American Lend-Lease, gave British workers, or at least those in the lower wage brackets, a higher standard of living than they had ever enjoyed before. The Ministry of Labour, with widely extended functions, was in the hands of the outstanding British trade union leader of all time, and his actions received the consistent and firm support of the Prime Minister, who was himself one of the greatest wartime holders of that office, if not the greatest. A whole hierarchy of joint trade union-employer committees, with the Joint Consultative Committee at their apex, gave trade union leaders a share in the running of industries and services well beyond anything that had existed before the war; and in the individual plants joint production committees allowed shop stewards and other union members to participate in decisions concerning the running of the enterprise. Above all, from the summer of 1943 onwards it became more and more evident that all these efforts were proving successful. The allies were winning the war.

With a majority Labour government in office in Britain for the first time, the post-war years might have been expected to give even more satisfaction to trade-unionists than the wartime coalition had; and, perhaps for the first year or so, they did so. Although many of the post-war reforms in the social-security system and the health service had been anticipated in part by temporary wartime provisions, their universal application was a substantial benefit to the lower middle class and their families as well as to manual workers and their families. The passage of nationalization Acts applying to several major industries satisfied socialist ambitions, even if the immediate advantages to their employees and customers were not readily apparent. However, a major economic problem faced the new government within a few weeks of taking office. Lend-Lease was terminated by the United States Congress in August 1945. The Americans were well aware that the ending of their assistance would have a devastating effect on the British economy unless another form of aid took its place, and by the end of the year a massive loan had been negotiated on what would have been most favourable terms, except that sterling had to be made convertible in July 1947. Before that date the rate at which the dollars were being spent rose sharply owing to various pressures on the British economy, but after it the drain became catastrophic, and convertibility had to be suspended, with very little left in the kitty. Happily the first moves had already been made to establish the European Recovery Programme as a new vehicle of assistance to Britain as well as to other non-communist countries. In 1949, however, a depression in the United States caused new problems for the British

economy which were overcome by a substantial devaluation of the pound.

These problems were exacerbated by the advent of the Cold War in 1947. The rupture of good relations between the wartime allies in the East and in the West led in 1950 to the Korean War, when communist North Korea invaded non-communist South Korea. Britain joined the United States in sending troops to assist the South Koreans, and instituted a programme of rearmament, which entailed further calls on the hard-pressed British economy. One of the early consequences of these pressures on the British economy was that the General Council had second thoughts about the termination of the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order which, with its ban on strikes and lockouts, was due to run out in February 1946. A few weeks before that, an augmented meeting of the General Council's Finance and General Purposes Committee decided that, in the current favourable bargaining conditions for trade unions, it would be advisable for the order to be renewed. The General Council had already taken the initiative in the co-ordination of collective bargaining by proposing to its affiliated unions that there be a general reduction in weekly working hours from forty-seven or forty-eight hours to forty. However, by the time Congress met in September 1945, Citrine was suggesting that this concession should be pursued in stages, with the first stage being a forty-four-hour working week; and subsequent negotiations industry by industry, with the help of several courts of inquiry, achieved that objective for most manual workers.

The fuel crisis in February 1947 prompted the General Council to appoint its Special Committee on the Economic Situation, which in September recommended to Congress that joint production committees be revived and that special efforts be made to increase the output of coal. Lloyd Roberts, previously chief labour officer of ICI, was appointed to the Ministry of Labour to promote production committees. In October the miners' five-day-week agreement was suspended to allow additional time to be worked in the pits, and the building industry introduced payment by results. An indication of another remedy that the government wanted to use came with the letter from the Minister of Labour to several unions urging reconsideration of the claims for wage increases which they had submitted to wages councils. Over the winter the General Council began to give indications that it would not necessarily reject a proposal for a wage policy from the government; and on 4 February 1948 the government published its White Paper on *Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices*, which suggested that there should be 'no further increase in the level of personal incomes without at least a corresponding increase in the volume of production', which the General



Council accepted so long as there was to be no interference with collective bargaining and so long as four specific grounds for increased wages were admitted. A month later a conference of union executives gave these proposals its support by a majority of more than five to two.

Over the following months a number of wage settlements went through without a sign of government interference, and an engineering pay-claim was referred to a court of inquiry, which reported that it was difficult to justify any part of it by the standards laid down in the White Paper, but in view of the understanding that claims under consideration at the time of its publication were to be considered 'on their merits', recommended a general increase of 25p a week for adult males. Altogether 7,759,000 wage-earners received a pay increase in 1948, substantially more than in 1947, which was the peak year for reductions in the standard working week. At Congress in September 1948 the policy received almost exactly the same majority as the conference of executives had given it in March. In 1949 the policy began to bite. At just over £1 million a week, the total weekly amount of pay increases was by far the lowest since the war, except for 1947. However, it was also the year in which the British economy ran into trouble because of the depression in the United States, which the British government sought to remedy by devaluation. The special committee took the view that this made even greater restraint on wages necessary, and proposed a policy of 'rigorous restraint', involving no alteration in wage rates so long as the price index remained between 106 and 118, which would entail unions with cost-of-living sliding scales forgoing increases due to them under their agreements when prices rose within those limits. A conference of union executives accepted this policy, but it soon became clear that some, at least, of the unions concerned were not willing to comply. A number of increases due under such agreements took effect in the first half of 1950; but it was not until Congress in September rejected by a narrow majority the General Council's imprecise statement on the need for 'greater flexibility of wage movements', and accepted by a similar majority a resolution from the Electricians instructing the General Council to abandon wage restraint, that a spate of substantial wage settlements proved that the policy had ceased to have effect. Soon afterwards, by using the statutory basis of wartime industrial relations, the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order, to prosecute the leaders of a London gasworkers' strike, the government made sure that the order, with its ban on strikes and lockouts, would have to go.

On 19 September 1951 Attlee asked for a dissolution, and the subsequent general election gave the Conservatives a majority of seats, although the Labour Party had a narrow majority of the votes. Attlee



resigned, and Churchill became Prime Minister again, this time of a Conservative government. It would be foolish to attempt to attribute the Labour Party's electoral defeat to a single cause, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the government's wage policy was one of the reasons for its loss of popularity since its convincing victory in 1945. It is also possible to assert with some confidence that the policy of severe restraint was a mistake. It was not operated; it drove Congress to repudiate wage policy; and it was unnecessary because the current problem of the drain on sterling was solved by devaluation. The government's claim that devaluation made it necessary 'to act with even greater restraint on wages' was manifestly false. It might have been true that wage restraint was still needed despite devaluation, but since devaluation eased the pressure on sterling, restraint on wages could not have been *more* necessary. Perhaps, however, wage policy was a mistake from the start. It is true that other countries, notably Scandinavian countries, have been able to run wage policies, with trade union co-operation, for a number of years with reasonable success; but their trade union movements are designed to a much more manageable pattern than that of Britain, with a central federation possessing considerably greater authority than the General Council of Congress, and without independent workshop organizations to match the power of British shop stewards. Perhaps the Labour government of 1945-51 should have relied more on economic measures other than wage policy to resolve its problems. Both subsequent Labour governments in Britain, in 1964-70 and in 1974-9, along with the intervening Conservative government, tried to deal with economic difficulties akin to those faced by Attlee's government by means of wage policies, but the failure of all of them could be taken as another indication that such policies are best avoided in Britain.

One other assertion can be made with some certainty: that the years 1940-51 were those of the greatest achievements of the British trade union movement, which makes 1951 an appropriate year for the termination of this *History of British Trade Unions since 1889*.



# Statistical Appendix

TABLE I. *Total trade union membership compared with membership affiliated to Trades Union Congress and to Labour Party, and total membership of registered unions*

Year	Total membership(000s)	Trades Union Congress (000s)	Labour Party (000s)	Registered Unions (000s)
1933	4,350	3,368	1,899	3,347
1934	4,539	3,295	1,858	3,513
1935	4,803	3,389	1,913	3,795
1936	5,225	3,615	1,969	4,210
1937	5,757	4,009	2,037	4,695
1938	5,969	4,461	2,158	4,867
1939	6,206	4,669	2,214	5,019
1940	6,519	4,867	2,227	5,363
1941	7,048	5,079	2,231	5,928
1942	7,722	5,433	2,206	6,530
1943	8,031	6,024	2,237	6,839
1944	7,936	6,642	2,375	6,756
1945	7,684	6,576	2,510	6,536
1946	8,603	6,671	2,635	7,475
1947	8,931	7,540	4,386	7,758
1948	9,118	7,791	4,751	7,917
1949	9,077	7,937	4,946	7,884
1950	9,021	7,883	4,972	7,948
1951	9,266	7,828	4,937	8,287

Sources: Total membership from Bain and Price; annual reports of Trades Union Congress and Labour Party; and registered unions from *Ministry of Labour Gazette*.

TABLE 2. *Membership of ten largest British unions, 1933 and 1951*

1933 (000s)		1951 (000s)	
Miners' Federation	501	Transport and General Workers	1,242
Transport and General Workers	371	General and Municipal Workers	785
Railwaymen	270	Engineers	716
General and Municipal Workers	241	Mineworkers	602
Engineers	168	Railwaymen	392
Teachers	153	Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers	342
Distributive and Allied Workers	128	Woodworkers	192
Weavers	116	Electricians	192
Post Office Workers	98	Teachers	190
Woodworkers	97	Public Employers	175
TOTAL	2,143		4,833

Sources: Annual reports of Trades Union Congress, except for National Union of Teachers, which was not affiliated to Congress in those years; the union itself supplied the relevant figures.



TABLE 3. *Itemized expenditure of registered unions as percentage of total expenditure in selected years*

Year	Total (£)	Unemployment benefit (%)	Dispute benefit (%)	Friendly benefit (%)	From political fund (%)	Administration (%)
1934	8,306,000	30.15	2.78	28.18	2.03	36.85
1938	7,437,000	11.64	1.99	33.19	1.57	51.61
1942	7,651,000	1.10	1.10	36.23	1.45	60.12
1946	10,277,000	2.66	2.66	34.40	1.96	58.33
1951	15,494,000	0.84	1.12	28.28	3.50	66.25

*Notes:* No overall information is published on trade union income and expenditure. For this period such information is available only for registered unions, whose membership constituted 76.9 per cent of total trade union membership in 1934, and 80.0 per cent in 1951.

The figures in this table have been derived from the statistics of registered unions published annually in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*. A substantial part of the payment of unemployment benefit covered disbursement by unions which acted as agents of the government in this respect, but this had little effect from 1940 onwards.

The last column is headed 'Other' in the *Gazette*, but it largely consists of administrative expenses.

The main effect of the decline in unemployment on union funds from 1934 onwards was to swell the surplus retained by the unions. Funds at the end of the year rose from £14,477,000 in 1934 to £64,825,000 in 1951. Since prices rose by about 80 per cent or more over the period, the rise in the value of these reserves was about 250 per cent.

## Biographies

The two sources used for these biographies are the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the obituaries printed in the *Annual Reports* of the Trades Union Congress. The former includes relatively few trade-unionists in this period, and the latter appears to be more haphazard in its coverage of 1934 to 1951 than of earlier years. Nevertheless, the information may be of assistance to the reader.

ALLEN, WILLIAM (1889–1958). Successively Executive Committee Member, President, Organizing Secretary, and Assistant Secretary, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen; Secretary, 1940–7. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1940–7. Member, Railway Executive, 1947. Subsequently Chief of Establishments and Staff, British Transport Commission.

BENSTEAD, JOHN (1897–1979). Organizer, National Union of Railwaymen, 1935–9; Assistant Secretary, 1939–42; Secretary, 1943–7. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1943–7. Deputy Chairman, British Transport Commission, 1947–61. Kt., 1953.

BEVIN, ERNEST (1881–1951). District and later National Organizer, Dock Wharf Riverside and General Workers' Union, 1911–20; Assistant Secretary, 1920–1. Secretary, Transport and General Workers' Union, 1922–46. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1925–40; Chairman, 1936–7. MP, 1940–51. Minister of Labour, 1940–5. Foreign Secretary, 1945–51. Lord Privy Seal, 1951.

BOWMAN, JAMES (1898–1978). Secretary, Northumberland Miners' Association. Executive Committee, Miners Federation of Great Britain, 1935–8; Vice-President, 1939–49. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1946–9. Chairman, Northern Division, National Coal Board, 1950–4; Deputy Chairman, 1955; Chairman, 1956–61. Kt., 1957. Bt., 1961.

BROMLEY, JOHN (1876–1945). Organizer, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, 1910–14; Secretary, 1914–36. Executive Committee, Labour Party, 1920–1. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1921–36; Chairman, 1931–2. MP, 1924–31.

BROWN, WILLIAM JOHN (1894–1960). Secretary, Assistant Clerks' Association, 1920–2. Secretary, Civil Service Clerical Association, 1922–42; Parliamentary Secretary, 1942–7. MP, 1929–31, 1942–50.

BUSSEY, E. W. (1891–1958). President, Electrical Trades Union, 1929–41; Secretary, 1941–7. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1941–7. Member, British Electricity Authority, 1947–56.

CHESTER, GEORGE (1886–1949). Succession of posts in National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives; Secretary, 1937–49. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1937–49. Kt., 1949.

CITRINE, WALTER (1887-1983). Mersey District Secretary, Electrical Trades Union, 1914-20; Assistant General Secretary, 1920-4. Assistant Secretary, Trades Union Congress, 1924-6; Secretary, 1926-46. Member, National Coal Board, 1946-7. Chairman, Central Electricity Authority, 1947-57. Kt., 1935. B., 1946.

CLYNES, JOHN ROBERT (1869-1949). Organizer, National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers, later National Union of General Workers, 1891-6; Lancashire District Secretary, 1896-1917; Chairman, 1912-16; President, National Union of General Workers, later National Union of General and Municipal Workers, 1916-37. Executive Committee, Labour Party, 1904-39; Chairman, 1908-9. MP, 1906-31, 1935-45. Lord Privy Seal, 1924. Home Secretary, 1929-31.

COLE, GEORGE DOUGLAS HOWARD (1889-1959). Research Adviser, Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 1915-18. Honorary Secretary, Labour Research Department, 1918-24. Reader in Economics, Oxford University, 1925-44; Professor of Social and Political Theory, 1944-57.

COOPER, JACK (1908-1988). Clerk, Manchester District, National Union of General and Municipal Workers, 1928-33; District Officer, 1934-42; National Officer, 1942-4; Southern District Secretary, 1944-7; Acting London District Secretary, 1948-50; Chairman, 1952-61; Secretary, 1962-70. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1959-72; Chairman, 1970-1. B., 1966.

CRAMP, CONCEMORE THOMAS THWAITES (1876-1933). President, National Union of Railwaymen, 1918-19; Industrial Secretary, 1920-31; Secretary, 1931-3. Executive Committee, Labour Party, 1918-29; Chairman, 1924-5. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1929-33.

DEAKIN, ARTHUR (1890-1955). Organizer, Dock Wharf Riverside and General Workers' Union, 1919-21. Assistant District Secretary, Transport and General Workers' Union, 1922-32; Secretary, General Workers' Trade Group, 1932-5; Assistant Secretary, 1935-40; Acting Secretary, 1940-5; Secretary, 1945-55. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1940-55; Chairman, 1951-2.

DUKES, CHARLES (1881-1948). Full-time Branch Secretary, National Union of General Workers, 1911-15; Organizer, 1915-24. Leeds District Secretary, National Union of General and Municipal Workers, 1924-5; Lancashire District Secretary, 1925-34; Secretary, 1934-46. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1934-46; Chairman, 1945-6. B., 1947.

EDWARDS, EBENEZER (1884-1961). Financial Secretary, Northumberland Miners' Association, 1920-32. Executive Committee, Miners' Federation of Great Britain, later National Union of Mineworkers, 1926-30; Vice-President, 1930-1; President, 1931-2; Secretary, 1932-46. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1931-46; Chairman, 1943-4. Chief Labour Relations Officer, National Coal Board, 1946-53. MP, 1929-31.

EVANS, LINCOLN (1890-1970). Successively Branch Secretary, Executive Council Member, Chairman, and Organizer, Iron and Steel Trades Confederation; General Secretary, 1946-53. General Council, Trades Union

Congress, 1945-52. Vice-Chairman, Iron and Steel Board, 1953-60. Kt., 1953.

FIGGINS, J.B. (1897-1956). Executive Council, National Union of Railwaymen, 1931-3; Road Transport Organizer, 1938-40; District Organizer, South-East, 1940-3; Assistant General Secretary, 1943-7; Acting General Secretary, 1947-8; General Secretary, 1948-53. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1947-52.

HALLSWORTH, JOSEPH (1885-1974). General Secretary, Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees, later Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers, 1917-47. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1926-47; Chairman, 1938-9. Member, National Coal Board, 1947-9. Chairman, North-west Electricity Board, 1949-55. Kt., 1946.

HENDERSON, ARTHUR (1863-1935). Organizer, Friendly Society of Ironfounders, 1892-1902; National Organizer, 1902-11; Parliamentary Representative, 1911-13; President, Friendly Society of Ironfounders, later National Union of Foundry Workers, 1913-35. Executive Committee, Labour Party, 1904-11; Secretary, 1911-35. MP, 1903-18, 1919-22, 1923, 1924-31, 1933-5. President, Board of Education, 1915-16. Paymaster-General, 1916. Minister without Portfolio, 1916-17. Home Secretary, 1924. Foreign Secretary, 1929-31.

HICKS, GEORGE ERNEST (1879-1954). National Organizer, Operative Bricklayers' Society, 1912-18; Secretary, Operative Bricklayers' Society, later Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, 1919-40. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1921-40; Chairman, 1926-7. MP, 1921-50. Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Works, 1940-5.

HILL, EDWARD (1899-1969). Successively Shop Steward, Branch Secretary, and London Organizer of the United Society of Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders, later the Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers; General Secretary, 1948-65. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1948-65; Chairman, 1960-61. B., 1967.

HILL, LEVI CLEMENT (1883-1961). Secretary, National Association of Local Government Officers, 1909-43. Head of Sub-department of Public and Social Administration, Exeter University, 1946-56.

HOLMES, WILLIAM (1873-1962). Member, Executive Council, National Union of Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers, later National Union of Agricultural Workers, 1911-28; President, 1922-8; Secretary, 1928-49. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1928-45; Chairman, 1939-40.

HORNER, ARTHUR LEWIS (1894-1968). Miners' Agent, Anthracite Area, South Wales Miners' Federation, 1933-6; President, South Wales Miners' Federation, 1936-44. Executive Council, Miners Federation of Great Britain, 1927-8, 1936-44. Production Officer, National Union of Mineworkers, 1945-6; Secretary, 1946-59.

ISAACS, GEORGE (1884-1979). Secretary, National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants, 1910-45. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1932-45;



Chairman 1944-5. MP, 1929-31, 1939-51. Minister of Labour and National Service, 1945-51. Minister of Pensions, 1951.

JONES, J. W. (1900-1988). Correspondence Secretary, London Busmen's Rank and File Committee, 1933-7. Various offices in the London Region of the Transport and General Workers' Union, for many years Member of its Executive Council, and for a time its Vice-Chairman. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1967-70.

KEAN, WILLIAM (1871-1954). Secretary, National Union of Gold, Silver and Allied Trades, 1911-52. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1921-45; Chairman, 1934-5.

LAWTHER, WILLIAM (1889-1976). Successively checkweighman, Miners' Agent and Treasurer, Durham Miners' Association. Vice-President, Miners' Federation of Great Britain, 1934; President, Miners' Federation of Great Britain, later National Union of Mineworkers, 1939-54. Executive Committee, Labour Party, 1923-6. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1935-54; Chairman, 1948-9. MP, 1929-31. Kt., 1949.

LESLIE, JOHN R. (1874-1955). Secretary, National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, 1924-35. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1924-5. MP, 1935-50.

MARCHBANK, JOHN (1883-1946). President, National Union of Railwaymen, 1922-4; Assistant Secretary, 1925-33; Secretary, 1933-42. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1924-5, 1933-43.

NAESMITH, ANDREW (1888-1961). Official, Oldham Weavers' Association, and later of Todmorden and District Weavers' Association. Assistant Secretary, Amalgamated Weavers' Association, 1925-8; Secretary, 1928-53. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1945-53.

PAPWORTH, ALBERT (1899-1980). Organizer, London Busmen's Rank and File Committee, 1933-7. Executive Council, Transport and General Workers' Union, 1933-7, 1941-9. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1944-8. Secretary, London Transport Friendly Society, 1952-64.

PUGH, ARTHUR (1870-1955). Local Secretary, British Steel Smelters' Amalgamated Association, 1890-1906; Assistant Secretary, 1906-17. Secretary, Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, 1917-37. Parliamentary Committee, later General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1920-36; Chairman, 1925-6. Kt., 1935.

ROBERTS, BRYN (1897-1964). Checkweighman and then Miners' Agent, South Wales Miners' Federation. General Secretary, National Union of Public Employees, 1934-62.

SPENCE, W. ROBERT (1876-1954). Merchant service, 1890-1911. Branch Officer, National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union, later National Union of Seamen, 1911-13; District Secretary, South-west Coast, 1913-28; Secretary, 1928-42. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1931-41.

STEVENS, WALTER (1904-1954). London Area Officer, Electrical Trades Union;

London Area Secretary, 1940-2; Assistant General Secretary, 1942-8; General Secretary, 1948-54.

TANNER, FREDERICK JOHN SHIRLEY (1889-1965). Organizer, Amalgamated Engineering Union, 1931-9; President, 1939-54. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1943-54; Chairman, 1953-4.

THORNE, WILLIAM JAMES (1857-1946). Secretary, National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers, later National Union of General Workers, and later National Union of General and Municipal Workers, 1889-1934. Parliamentary Committee, later General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1894-1934; Chairman, 1911-12. MP, 1906-45.

WILLIAMSON, THOMAS (1897-1983). Clerical Officer, London District, National Amalgamated Union of Labour, later National Union of General and Municipal Workers, 1913-33; District Officer, 1933-7; National Officer, 1937-46; Secretary, 1946-61. General Council, Trades Union Congress, 1947-61; Chairman, 1956-7. MP, 1945-8. Kt., 1956. B., 1962.

WILSON, JOSEPH HAVELOCK (1858-1929). Secretary, National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union, 1889-1903; President, National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union, later National Union of Seamen, 1894-1929. Parliamentary Committee, Trades Union Congress, 1889-98, 1918-19. MP, 1892-5, 1918-22.

WOODCOCK, GEORGE (1904-79). Official, Amalgamated Weavers' Association, 1922-7. Student, Ruskin College, and later Oxford University, 1929-33. Secretary, Research Department, Trades Union Congress, 1936-47; Assistant Secretary, 1947-60; Secretary, 1960-9. Chairman, Commission on Industrial Relations, 1969-71. Privy Councillor, 1967.

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A similar practice has been adopted with government publications. In addition, there is a note on the use of records of trade unions, the Labour Party, and employers' organizations.

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- Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs
- Confederation of Health Service Employees
- Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions
- General and Municipal Workers' Union
- National and Local Government Officers' Association
- National Graphical Association
- National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers
- National Union of Public Employees
- National Union of Railwaymen
- National Union of Seamen
- National Union of Teachers
- Printing and Kindred Trades Federation
- Society of Graphical and Allied Trades
- Transport and General Workers' Union
- Union of Construction and Allied Trades
- British Employers' Confederation



Engineering Employers' Federation  
National Federation of British Employers

Where the records of these bodies are quoted, a footnote reference is given if necessary, but more often the context indicates the union, the type of record, and the date. Page references are not given except for the annual reports and conference reports of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party.



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