

Whitehall,  
February 14. 1867.

Sir,

I herewith enclose a  
Commission under Her Majesty's  
Royal Sign Manual, appointing  
you, together with The Earl of  
Lichfield, Lord Ercho, and the  
several other Gentlemen therein  
named, to be Her Majesty's  
Commissioners to Inquire into  
and Report on the Organization  
and Rules of Trades' Unions,  
with the several matters relating  
thereto.

I am Sir,

Your obedient servant

S. H. Walpole

The Right Hon<sup>ble</sup>.  
Sir William Erle, Bart

# THE CONGRESS OF 1868

*The Origins and Establishment  
of the Trades Union Congress*

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## INTRODUCTION

The founding of the Trades Union Congress is generally recognised as a landmark in the history of British trade unionism and of the whole labour Movement. Yet before this booklet was first published, in 1955, it had never been satisfactorily investigated and explained. George Howell wrote brief historical sketches in an article, 'Trades Union Congresses and Social Legislation,' in the *Contemporary Review*, September 1889, and in his *Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders* (1905); he also appears to have been the author of a special article which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* in September 1882, on the occasion of the second Congress to be held in Manchester, where it had first met fourteen years before.<sup>1</sup> The Webbs wrote a great deal about earlier attempts at general union, but their account of immediate T.U.C. origins was contained in a mere footnote to their trade union history.<sup>2</sup> W. J. Davis in his *History of the British Trades Union Congress* (1910) was extremely sketchy. Professor G. D. H. Cole wrote some notes on British trade unionism in that period,<sup>3</sup> which threw interesting light on T.U.C. origins, but his purpose was not to make a detailed study of the latter subject. No other writer had done much to illuminate it before this booklet first appeared. Since then, Professor B. C. Roberts has written *The Trades Union Congress, 1868-1921* (1958), which provides a full and scholarly history of the Congress, over that whole period, but adds nothing of substance to the account of the T.U.C.'s establishment. As *The Congress of 1868* remains authoritative, it is now, in this centenary edition, reprinted with only minor modifications. The original summons to the first Congress-the 'Proposed Congress of Trades Councils and other Federations of Trade Societies'-dated February 21st, 1868, was only discovered by the author after the first edition had gone to press in 1955, and had therefore to be squeezed in as an addendum. Now it can be properly incorporated and is to be found on page 32.

<sup>1</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 14 and 15, 1882.

<sup>2</sup> Webb, S. and B., *History of Trade Unionism* (1920), p. 280, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cole, G. D. H., 'Some Notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century,' in *the International Review of Social History*, vol. ii (1937) pp. 1-23.

## CHAPTER I

### FORERUNNERS OF THE T.U.C.

ORGANISED WORKERS in different trades had frequently co-operated and met in conference before what is officially regarded as the first Trades Union Congress in 1868. Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Professor G. D. H. Cole have provided full accounts of the attempts to form a general trades' union or federation in the period up to 1834,<sup>1</sup> with the national trades' conferences organised by John Doherty and Robert Owen. One of these conferences, that in London in October 1833, was described as a 'Co-operative and Trades' Union Congress,'<sup>2</sup> the name deriving from the earlier 'congresses' of Owenite co-operative societies.<sup>3</sup>

These efforts collapsed in 1834 and trade unionism declined in the following years. Failure produced widespread disillusionment with general unionism, while many individual societies broke up and others only survived with difficulty in the trade depression of 1836-42. Owen continued to summon annual 'Socialist Congresses,' and Chartist 'Conventions' were held in 1839 and 1842, but in these trade unions had little part. The famous trial of the Glasgow cotton spinners, followed by the appointment of a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into trade combinations in 1838, revived trade union solidarity, joint trades' defence committees being organised in several towns, led by London; but the fillip was only temporary.<sup>4</sup>

It was not until 1845 that another serious attempt at general trades' federation was made, with the establishment of the 'National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour.'<sup>5</sup> Again we find trade union delegates from all parts of the country attending national conferences or 'Labour Parliaments,' but the Association proved a failure, most of the larger societies refusing to join. There was still strong opposition to 'general union' or trades' federation, the majority

<sup>1</sup> Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 113-68. Cole, G. D. H., *Attempts at General Union, 1818-34* (1953).

<sup>2</sup> *Poor Man's Guardian*, Oct. 19, 1833.

<sup>3</sup> For which, see Holyoake, G. J., *History of Co-operation in England* (1906), vol. i, pp. 120-25.

<sup>4</sup> Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 170-73.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 186-95.

of unions preferring to concentrate on organising their own individual trades. The Association also suffered from renewed trade depression in 1846-47, sporadic strikes, and inter-union differences. It lingered on until the sixties, but was of little practical importance.' Nevertheless, it is an interesting forerunner of the T.U.C., as 'a premature and imperfect Parliamentary Committee of the trade union world,' with its aim of federated trades' action not merely for mutual support in strikes, but also for promoting 'all measures, political and social and educational, which are intended to improve the condition of the labouring classes.'

Sectionalism remained strong among trade unions in the 1850s, but mutual financial assistance was often given in strikes and there was another attempt at national trades' federation. In 1853-54, during the widespread strikes and lock-outs in Lancashire (the lock-out of the Preston cotton operatives, the Manchester dyers' strike, etc.) and elsewhere, Ernest Jones, the Chartist leader, tried to organise a national 'Mass Movement' and 'Labour Parliament' among trade unionists, in view of 'the futility of sectional struggles on the part of isolated bodies of working men, to maintain a just standard of wages and to achieve the emancipation of labour.' A national conference was held in Manchester in March 1854, attended by trade union delegates from all over the country,' and efforts were made to raise a national subscription for the assistance of those on strike or locked out; meanwhile, in London, Manchester, Birmingham, and other cities there were local meetings of trades' delegates to rally support, and considerable sums were collected. The movement was short-lived, but the London Committee of Metropolitan Trades' Delegates pointed out 'that the time cannot be far distant when a more complete association of trades must exist than does at present and when the means of rendering support to others must be systematically and universally organised.'

The builders' strike in London in 1859-60 over the nine-hour day

<sup>1</sup> George Odger stated in 1866 that 'though there is a remnant of it, it is a perfect myth, so far as its recognition by societies at large is concerned.' (*Report of Conference of Trades' Delegates*, Sheffield, July 1866). George Howell stated that it 'continued to exist until 1867.' (*Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders*, 1905, vol. i, p. 95. Cf. his statement in the *Contemporary Review*, Sept. 1889, that it 'continued in existence down to 1861.')

<sup>2</sup> Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, p. 195.  
<sup>3</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Nov. 23, 1853, and March 8, 1854, containing reports of meetings in Manchester. A full account of the movement is to be found in the *People's Paper* published by Jones.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx and Louis Blanc were elected honorary delegates, but did not attend the conference. Marx, however, sent a letter in its support.

<sup>5</sup> *Address from the Delegates of the Metropolitan Trades to the Trades of the United Kingdom* (1854). See also the report on *Trades' Societies and Strikes* (pp. 220 and 260-63) issued by the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (1860).

again revived the feeling of solidarity between different trades, weekly meetings of metropolitan delegates being held and subscriptions received from all parts of the kingdom.' As a result the London Trades Council was established in 1860, a permanent association of metropolitan trade societies, for mutual aid in strikes and concerted action on matters of general concern such as labour legislation. Similar organisations were also established in other cities round about this time. Local meetings of trades' delegates had often been held since the early part of the century, but only in particular emergencies-during strikes, for example, or to agitate against threatened legislation-without having a continuous existence. Now permanent organisations were coming into being in London, Liverpool, Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, and other towns.' It was from these local trades councils that a national Trades Union Congress was to arise.

The London Trades Council soon came to be dominated by the general secretaries of several national amalgamated societies with their headquarters in the metropolis-William Allan of the Engineers, Robert Applegarth of the Carpenters and Joiners, Daniel Guile of the Ironfounders-together with some of the leading officials of London societies, such as George Odger of the Ladies Shoemakers and Edwin Coulson of the Bricklayers. This small group, nicknamed the 'Junta' by the Webbs, became 'an informal cabinet of the trade union world,' assuming leadership of the whole movement, so that the minutes of the Council 'present a mirror of the trade union history of this period.' The Council's power of granting 'credentials' to societies which appealed for aid in strikes or lock-outs, recommending them for financial aid to the metropolitan trades, gave them great influence over the conduct of disputes all over the country, especially as the powerful amalgamated societies provided most of the money. Their policy was a cautious one of conciliation and arbitration, with financial support only where negotiations proved futile-a policy which was dictated largely by their concern for safeguarding their funds, which were primarily for the provision of friendly benefits. But this cautious trade policy they combined with energetic agitation for political reforms. The duties of the London Trades Council were

<sup>1</sup> Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, p. 228. *Trades' Societies and Strikes* (1860), pp. 53-76. Howell, G., *Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders* (1905), vol. i, pp. 128-35. Postgate, R., *The Builders' History* (1923), pp. 167-79. Anon., *The London Trades Council, 1860-1950* (1950), pp. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 242-43. Richards, C., *A History of Trades Councils from 1860 to 1875* (1920).  
<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 245 and 247. See also Anon., *The London Trades Council, 1860-1950* (1950), pp. 9 and 151-6.

'to watch over the general interests of labour, political and social, both in and out of Parliament,' and 'to use their influence in supporting any measure likely to benefit trades' unions.'" Thus we find the Council campaigning in the early sixties for the franchise, for amendment of the Master and Servant Law, for Conciliation and Arbitration Acts, for new Mines Regulation Acts, and other labour legislation. Moreover, their political interests extended to foreign as well as domestic affairs, to the American Civil War, Italian liberation, and the Polish revolt of 1863, on all of which demonstrations were organised.' The chief reason for this changeover by British trade unionism from its former non-political attitude was 'its sense of the legal restraints under which it operated'<sup>3</sup>-the law regarding combinations and the master and servant law-and the desire for legislative enactments to improve the conditions of the workers. It was in united political action of this sort that the Trades Union Congress was to originate, for, as we shall see, the Congress was to be an embodiment of trade union solidarity in the political rather than the industrial sphere; its main purpose, that is, was originally to organise trade unions in political agitation for their own defence rather than for joint action in trade affairs.

The junta's industrial and political activity brought them into touch with provincial leaders such as Alexander Macdonald of the Miners' National Union, Alexander Campbell of the Glasgow Trades Council, John Kane of the North of England Ironworkers, and William Dronfield of the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades. These men were generally in agreement with the junta's policy, but gradually they began to seek a more nationally representative organisation for securing their aims, instead of the narrow control exercised by the junta. Moreover, the smaller, locally organised, provincial societies were generally more militant than the large amalgamated unions with their headquarters in London, and did not always take kindly to the junta's policy of industrial pacifism.

One of the first proposals, however, for united political action by the trade unions on a national scale came from the metropolitan building trades-which, as we have seen, were in the van of trade

unionism in the early sixties-and was, it appears, a product of their struggle against their employers. In 1861 we find the Bricklayers' Society advocating the union of all trades in a Labour Parliament to 'legislate for labour' and to exercise influence 'upon all social and political questions affecting their common interests.'" Nothing concrete, however, came of this proposal. There was still strong opposition in many trades to such mixing of trade unionism with politics.

Nevertheless, the idea was gaining ground and not only in London. In November 1861 the Glasgow Trades Council issued an address to the trades of the United Kingdom urging united political action, with the ultimate object of gaining manhood suffrage and the more immediate aims of reforming the law regarding combinations and the law of master and servant, and securing the establishment of councils of conciliation and arbitration? They suggested 'that all trades' councils, trade societies and suchlike associated bodies at once memorialise the Government' on the question of parliamentary reform, and that 'a monster national petition' should be 'got up for presentation to Parliament on the day of its opening.'

This proposal was rejected by the London Trades Council because the metropolitan societies generally were not yet converted to the idea of trade union political action. But it was not long before the junta brought about a change of policy and the minutes of the Council soon came to be filled with examples of activity on various political questions. Moreover, the junta were largely responsible for the establishment in 1862 of the 'Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association,' which was designed to enlist the trades of the United Kingdom in an agitation for the franchise, and was the forerunner of the Reform League established in 1865.<sup>3</sup>

It was the Glasgow Trades Council, however, which initiated the first successful political action by the trades generally, when, in 1863-64, under the leadership of Campbell and Macdonald, they launched a campaign for reform of the Master and Servant Acts. They secured the support of trades councils in other towns and then, in May 1864, convened a conference of trade union representatives in London, in order 'to give a national character to the Movement.'

<sup>1</sup> Operative Bricklayers' society's 7<sup>th</sup> Trade Circular, Oct.

<sup>2</sup> See the works by Gillespie and Brand previously cited.

<sup>3</sup> Report of Conference on the Law of Masters and Workmen ... Held in London on 30th and 31st May, and 1st and 2nd June, 1864 (Glasgow, 1864). See also Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 249-53.

<sup>1</sup> 1861 Rules.  
<sup>2</sup> See Humphrey, A. W., *History of Labours Representation* (1912), p. 10, Gillespie, F. E., *Labor and Politics in England from 1850 to 1867* (1927), pp. 203-34, and Brand, C. F., 'The Conversion of the British Trade-Unions to Political Action,' in the *American Historical Review*, Jan. 1925.  
<sup>3</sup> Gillespie, *op. cit.*, p. 227

partly to short notice, there were only about twenty representatives present, but they included such leading figures in the trade union Movement as Applegarth, Odger, Coulson, Guile, Potter, Campbell, Macdonald, and Dronfield-delegates not only from the trades councils of London, Glasgow, Sheffield, Liverpool, and Nottingham, but also from unions of engineers, carpenters and

etc. They proceeded to organise a vigorous political campaign of deputations, lobbying, and petitions to M.P.s, as a result of which a Parliamentary Committee was appointed in 1865, on whose report an amending Act was eventually passed in 1867. This was a notable success for united trades' action and the policy of political agitation.

The 1864 Conference also passed a resolution, on the proposal of William Dronfield, of Sheffield, 'with a view of some combined action being taken' to secure the establishment of Courts of Conciliation and Arbitration. After the opinions of the trades had been obtained, they were to be forwarded to the London Trades Council, who were 'to deal with it by calling delegate meetings from all parts of the country, or taking such other steps as may be most desirable.' The London Trades Council subsequently devoted a good deal of attention to this subject and organised political agitation upon it. Its report for 1864-65 stressed the value of united action among the trades, and the importance of the London Trades Council as 'a central and rallying point for all good projects effecting [sic] the cause of labour.' It pointed out 'the convenience of having a trades' council in London, ready to use the influence of the trades' societies upon the government at any time when the rights of labour may be assailed.' The Council 'should be the great centre for bringing together at proper times, and always when emergencies require them, representatives of the various societies, not only of London but of all parts of the United Kingdom.' The Council did not, however, consider it necessary to summon a national conference on the subject of Courts of Conciliation and Arbitration. An Act for the establishment of such courts was eventually passed in 1867, largely as a result of trade union agitation.

Meanwhile, however, the cautious trade policy and close control of the junta were meeting with strong criticism in the metropolis. There

<sup>1</sup> L.T.C. Sixth Annual Report (1864-65).

the junta's chief opponent and leader of the militant section was George Potter.' Born in 1832 at Kenilworth, the son of a carpenter, Potter, after serving an apprenticeship in his father's trade, had come to London in 1853 to find work. He soon became the secretary of the small Progressive Society of Carpenters and joiners and from <sup>18</sup> 57 onwards was virtually leader of the London building trades.' He led the Conference of the United Building Trades during the great strike and lock-out over the nine-hour day in 1859 and, in January 1861, was the leading figure at the builders' conference in Derby which established the short-lived 'United Kingdom Association for Shortening the Hours of Labour in the Building Trades.' Potter's leadership, however, was challenged by Robert Applegarth, who established the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and joiners in 1860. There soon developed a strong rivalry and personal dislike between the two. Potter was opposed to the cautious, bureaucratic, centralised control of Applegarth and the other officials of the large amalgamated societies, and to their pacific, friendly-society policy, preferring the personal contacts, direct action, and more aggressive methods of the older local societies. He was able to attract considerable support among the smaller London societies and in the provinces, where there was also opposition to the conservative policy and cliquish control of the junta.

Potter was no mean opponent. Handsome of person, a fine speaker, and capable organiser, he was also an expert in the arts of agitation and keeping himself in the limelight. He had established the Trades Newspaper Company in 1861 to publish the *Beehive*, of which he was manager and real controller, and which became the official organ of the London Trades Council. The rivalry between Potter and the Junta, however, soon created a split in the Council. The junta's dislike of him was due not merely to disagreement over trade union policy, but also to personal factors: Potter was a younger man than most of them and they disliked his self-advertisement, his control of the *Beehive*, his demagogic methods, his irresponsibility, and also, it appears, his drinking habits. They were altogether more serious, cautious, and conservative than the flamboyant Potter. The growing

<sup>1</sup> See Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 254-55, Postgate, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-218, Richards, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22, Anon., *The London Trades Council, 1860-1950 (1950)*, pp. 13-14 and 20-23. The main sources for the general history of metropolitan trade unionism in these years are the minutes and reports of the London Trades Council and the *Beehive*.

<sup>s</sup> Postgate, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

rivalry between them is writ large in the records of the Trades Council and in the *Beehive*. The Webbs adopted the junta's opinion of Potter as an irresponsible agitator of no real importance;' but this view does not appear to be either just or correct. Potter had a considerable body of support both in London and the provinces, and was one of the leading figures in the events leading up to the establishment of the Trades Union Congress'

The differences between Potter and the junta became increasingly pronounced during the numerous strikes and lock-outs of the middle sixties, in which Potter was a strong advocate of an aggressive policy as opposed to the conciliatory methods of the junta. Bitter feelings were aroused during the building trades' strike in the Midlands early in 1864, and in that of the North Staffordshire iron puddlers later in the same year. The latter dispute, in fact, brought about an open split.<sup>3</sup> The men, who were resisting a 10 per cent cut in wage rates, were encouraged by Potter, against the advice of the Ironfounders' executive and the London Trades Council, to reject the Earl of Lichfield's proposal that they should return to work pending arbitration. This, the London Trades Council considered, put them 'entirely in the wrong,' as they thus threw away the only reasonable method of settling the dispute, and the Council, therefore, could hardly be expected to give them financial aid. Potter, on the other hand, gave them enthusiastic support and, on his own responsibility and without consulting the Council, of which he was a member, summoned 'irresponsible meetings' of trades' delegates in London to organise the raising of subscriptions. His actions aroused considerable indignation and he was strongly denounced at a special meeting of the Trades Council in March 1865' Danter, president of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, declared that Potter 'had become the aider and abettor of strikes. He thought of nothing else; he followed no other business; strikes were his bread and cheese; in short, he was a strike-jobber, and he made the *Beehive* newspaper his instrument for pushing his nose into every unfortunate dispute that sprang up.' Potter was accused of seeking personal power and prestige by dubious means, e.g., by biased reports in the *Beehive* and by packing meetings.

Similar strictures were included in the Council's annual report presented to the annual delegate meeting in August 1865, with the result that there was a great row and Potter was excluded from the Council. Moreover, an adjourned meeting later decided to withdraw support from the *Beehive*.'

The Junta's great dislike of the prominence which Potter was achieving is rather amusingly illustrated by another incident in 1864. When Mr. Gladstone introduced his Post Office Annuities Bill in February, Potter summoned a meeting of the London trades to oppose it as an insidious attempt to divert the savings of working men from their trade unions and benefit societies into an exchequer controlled by the governing classes. This opposition was condemned by Gladstone in the House of Commons on March 7, when he referred to Potter as 'the far-famed secretary of the trades' unions.' The junta were furious and sent a deputation to enlighten the Chancellor and to support the Bill.' Potter was strongly denounced for having 'arrogated to himself the title of secretary of the trades of England.'

Potter declared at the annual delegate meeting of the London Trades Council in August 1865, that if the strictures upon him in the report were passed, the result might be 'the establishment of a counter-association.' In March 1866, therefore, he founded the London Working Men's Association, of which he was president and Robert Hartwell, the veteran Chartist, secretary. By this means and through the *Beehive* he sought to maintain his position in the working-class trade union and political Movements, despite the opposition of the Junta.<sup>5</sup> He could still reckon on the support of the more militant trade societies both in London and in the provinces, and he continued to assist strikes by numerous reports in the *Beehive*, by summoning meetings of the London trades, and collecting subscriptions.

The middle sixties saw the outbreak of many such strikes and lock-outs, one of the greatest of which was that in the Sheffield file trade, beginning in February 1866, over a request by the grinders for a wage increase.' This lock-out was denounced by the Sheffield Association

<sup>1</sup> L.T.C. minutes, Aug. and Sept. 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, Third Series, vol. clxxiii, Feb: Mar. 1864, p. 1577. See also Humphrey A. W., *The Life of Robert Applegarth* (1915), pp. 52-55.

<sup>3</sup> L.T.C. minutes, April 1865.

<sup>4</sup> L.T.C. Annual Delegate Meeting Report, Aug. 1865. The memory of this incident still rankled in 1867 (*Beehive*, March 9, 1867, statement by George Odger).

<sup>5</sup> The L.W.M.A. was opposed not only by the Trades Council, but also by the Reform League (which was supported by the L.T.C.), as being a rival organisation in the working-class movement for political reform. It was, in fact, a political rather than a trade union organisation. See Humphrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-21, Gillespie, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-56 and 258-59, Brand, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-62, and Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Detailed reports were given in the *Beehive* and in the Sheffield newspapers.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 254-55 and 298, n. 1. He was also an important figure in the labour political movement. See Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 10, n. 1, and Gillespie, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-11, 230-31, and 258-59.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Beehive* and the L.T.C. Sixth Annual Report (1864-65).

<sup>3</sup> Printed report, *Mr. Potter and the London Trades Council* (March 1865).



of Organised Trades, at a meeting on March 8, as 'an evident attempt to break up trade associations in Sheffield,' and they appealed 'for the assistance of not only the united trades of this town, but of every trades union in the Kingdom, in order to prevent such associations from becoming destroyed by the lock-out system.' Their appeal was favourably received by the London Trades Council, which gave the necessary 'credentials' and urged the metropolitan societies to render all possible support.' Potter meanwhile was writing stirring appeals in the *Beehive* and summoning meetings of the L.W.M.A. and the metropolitan trades to hear delegates from Sheffield and to organise financial assistance.

The lock-out attracted nation-wide notice and in April the Wolverhampton Trades Council passed a resolution urging that 'the time has arrived when the trades of the United Kingdom ought to take action conjointly to rebut the lock-out system now so prevalent with the capitalists; and the dispute and lock-out in the Sheffield file trade affords an excellent opportunity for carrying this into effect.' They therefore urged 'that a conference of trades' delegates of the United Kingdom should be held in Sheffield.' The London Trades Council was rather lukewarm in support of this proposal, but agreed, 'without committing itself to the principle involved,' to send a delegate to such a conference if summoned. Potter and the L.W.M.A., on the other hand, were enthusiastic. In an article in the *Beehive* on May 12, Potter pointed out that he had frequently urged the necessity for 'a better organisation of Labour,' and suggested that the whole of the trades in every town in the kingdom should be 'amalgamated into one great body, with a responsible and ruling head; and that the whole of these amalgamated trades, divided into five districts ... shall be represented in district Labour Parliaments, assembling quarterly, and that these district Parliaments should then be represented in one Labour Parliament, to meet annually.' The main purpose of this organisation would be to raise district and national funds to assist in any lock-outs or strikes.

The Wolverhampton proposal met with a favourable response from trades councils and trade societies all over the country, and the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades therefore decided to

<sup>1</sup> L.T.C. minutes, March 22 and May 10, 1866.  
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, May 1866. *Beehive*, April 28 and May 12, 1866.

summon 'a conference of trades' delegates' in Sheffield, to establish 'a national organisation among the trades of the United Kingdom, for the purpose of effectually resisting all lock-outs.' A circular was therefore issued 'to all national trades and trades' councils of the country.'" Had Sheffield not done so, Potter and the L.W.M.A. were preparing to summon such a national conference.

The leading figure in the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades was its secretary, William Dronfield, who was to play an important part in originating the idea of an annual Trades Union Congress. Dronfield was a journeyman compositor, secretary of the Sheffield Typographical Society and a member of the executive and for three years (1852-55) president of the Provincial Typographical Association, which had its headquarters in Sheffield until 1865.<sup>2</sup> He was largely responsible for the establishment of the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades, which originated out of a strike at the *Sheffield Times* office in 1858,' and of which he was secretary for nine years. Dronfield strongly supported the policy of political agitation for legislative reform and had attended the London trades' conference on the Master and Servant Law in 1864, where he had also urged united action to secure the legislative establishment of Courts of Conciliation and Arbitration. It was he who now wrote out and distributed the invitation to the Conference of Trades' Delegates, which was held in Sheffield in July 1866, and of which he was appointed secretary.'

This conference, attended by 138 delegates, representing nearly 200,000 members, was, 'one of the largest of the trades that ever assembled,' and, so Dronfield later claimed, 'laid the foundations of the annual trades congresses.'" A large number of societies were represented, including the trades councils of London, Sheffield, Preston, Hyde, Derby, Bristol, Halifax, Nottingham, Liverpool, Warrington, and Wolverhampton, many national unions, such as the Carpenters and Joiners, Ironworkers, Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders,

<sup>1</sup> *Beehive*, May 19, 1866.

There is a short biography of Dronfield by W. H. G. Armytage in *Notes and Queries*, vol. cxcjii (1948), pp. 145-48, in which, however, there are some inaccuracies regarding his official career in the Provincial Typographical Association. Brief biographical sketches are also to be found in the *Typographical Circular*, Sept. 1891 and Sept. 1894, and in the *Sheffield Independent*, Aug. 28, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> P.T.A. Half-Yearly Reports, 1858-59. *Typographical Societies' Monthly Circular*, 1858-59. *London Press Journal and General Trades' Advocate*, 1858-59. Lengthy accounts are also to be found in the Sheffield newspapers. The Webbs wrongly date the establishment of the Association in 1857 (*op. cit.*, p. 243, footnote).

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Conference of Trades' Delegates of the United Kingdom, held in ... Sheffield, on July 17th, 1866, and four following days* (Sheffield, 1866). The Webbs wrongly date this conference in June (*op. cit.*, p. 257). It was originally planned for that month, but the date was later altered.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Typographical Association, 1877 Delegate Meeting Report, p. 12.

Ironfounders, Tailors, Coopers, Painters, and Plasterers, many provincial or regional societies of miners, power-loom weavers, spinners, printers, and potters, as well as a large number of local societies. Potter was not there, but George Troup represented the L.W.M.A., and several other metropolitan societies also sent delegates, while George Odger came from the London Trades Council. The conference was composed predominantly, however, of representatives from the Midlands and North, the junta being rather lukewarm towards it, because of the enthusiastic support given to it by Potter and their distrust of the militant attitude of many provincial societies.

The chief outcome of this conference was the establishment of the 'United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades'-another attempt at a national association or federation of trades-for mutual support in lock-outs. The conference also advocated Courts of Conciliation and Arbitration, demanded amendment of the Master and Servant Law, and supported the principles of co-operation. The headquarters of the new Alliance were established in Sheffield: its executive was elected by the Sheffield trades and Dronfield was its secretary. It proved, however, no more successful than its predecessors. The Junta and the London trades generally held aloof,' and so did many important provincial societies. Further conferences were held in 1867 in Manchester (January) and Preston (September), but membership of the Alliance fell rapidly, due to internal dissensions, numerous strikes, trade depression, and inadequate funds,' and the Alliance, though lingering on for several years, soon ceased to be of any real importance.

There was another cause for its failure-the occurrence of the notorious trade union 'outrages' in Sheffield, where the Alliance had its headquarters. Non-unionists in certain trades were not only subjected to such persecution as the pilfering or destruction of their tools, with the object of forcing them to join a trade society and obey its regulations, but were also violently attacked and even, in a few

<sup>†</sup> The London Trades Council would not even pay its share of the conference expenses (L.T.C. Eighth Annual Report, 1866-67. *Beehive*, Jan. 5 and 12, 1867). Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 14, states that the Sheffield conference 'proposed that a further general Conference should be held in the following year, and that the London Trades Council should be requested to call it. To this request the London Trades Council appears to have paid no attention.' There seems, however, to be no evidence for this statement. There was some discussion at the 1866 conference as to whether the next one should be held in London or Manchester, but the decision was in favour of the latter (Report, pp. 67-68). There is no doubt, however, that the junta were lukewarm towards the Sheffield conference and opposed in 1867 to the summoning of another. See below, pp. 21-22.

<sup>‡</sup> See the conference reports, reports in the *Beehive*, and also Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 258-59. The Preston conference was attended by delegates from only thirteen societies and there were then only forty-seven small societies, with a total membership of 23,500 in the Alliance.

instances, murdered.' The climax to these 'rattening' outrages (which were not confined to Sheffield) came in October 1866, when a can of gunpowder was exploded in the house of a non-unionist saw-grinder in New Hereford Street, Sheffield. This was merely one of a succession of similar outrages, but in the state of public irritation against trade unionism, which had been growing during the past few years of lock-outs and strikes, it served to precipitate events. There was a loud outcry against trade unions and a strong demand for a public inquiry. This was supported by most of the unions themselves, which were anxious to be dissociated from criminal acts, to secure the punishment of those responsible, and to prove the necessity, usefulness, and moderation of the great majority of trade societies. The London Trades Council, for example, sent representatives to Sheffield and Nottingham to inquire into the outrages, strongly condemned 'the abominable practice of rattening,' and arranged a joint deputation of the London and Sheffield trades to the Home Secretary to urge the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry.<sup>2</sup> The United Kingdom Alliance also denounced the outrages, but it was eventually discovered (June 1867) that William Broadhead, its treasurer, was the ringleader. This disclosure naturally exposed the Alliance to great hostility from the press and from employers, while moderate trade unionists were shocked into abstention or desertion.

It was while trade unionism stood thus on the defensive, under attack for the outrages and strikes for which it was held responsible, that another blow fell, in the shape of a decision by the Court of Queen's Bench of crucial importance in trade union history. Since the Act of 1825-repealing the Combination Laws and excluding combined action in regard to wages and hours of labour from prosecution for conspiracy, except in so far as 'threatening,' 'violence,' 'molestation,' 'intimidation,' or 'obstruction' were involved-trade unions had ceased to be unlawful, but had not yet acquired any legal corporate status. They had, however, secured the insertion of a clause in the Friendly Societies Act of 1855, which had enabled those trade societies which deposited their rules with the Registrar to proceed against defaulting officials, thus, it was thought, securing legal protection for their funds. Now, however, in the famous case of *Horn by*

<sup>1</sup> Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 256-57 and 259-60.

<sup>2</sup> L.T.C. minutes and reports.

*v. Close*, concerning embezzlement by the treasurer of the Bradford branch of the Boilermakers' Society, the Court of Queen's Bench decided (January 16, 1867) that trade unions were not within the scope of the 1855 Act. Furthermore, the Lord Chief justice declared that although, since 1825, trade unions were not actually criminal, they were yet so far 'in restraint of trade' as to be illegal.' Thus not only were they bereft of legal status and protection for their funds, but the limited legal recognition of 1825 looked like being withdrawn, in view of the current outcry against trade unions. The threat became really serious when the Government decided early in February 1867 to appoint a Royal Commission of Inquiry into trade unions.

Trade unions everywhere rose in their own defence, but their agitation, though vigorous, was lacking in unity. The junta sought to maintain their leadership by establishing a 'Conference of Amalgamated Trades' in London-which, in reality, was simply themselves under another name-with the object of securing full legal recognition for trade unions and protection for their funds, and defeating the employers in their efforts to utilise the Royal Commission for the suppression of trade unionism.' They formed a 'permanent conference,' able 'to attend regularly, and at the shortest possible notice to this work.' It was considered 'essential that a number of men should be appointed who would not [have to] leave their employers' work in the daytime,' and so the conference was 'composed of secretaries of the various large societies.' It represented, in fact, only the national amalgamated societies of Engineers, Carpenters and Joiners, and Iron-founders, together with a few London societies such as the Bricklayers, Ladies' Shoemakers, and Vellum Binders. It had about a dozen members, of whom the chief were Allan, Applegarth, Guile, Coulson, and Odger.

The junta's leadership, however, was still strongly challenged by Potter and the L.W.M.A., supported by many of the small metropolitan societies. Rival deputations waited upon the Home Secretary in February 1867, and rival trades' meetings were held in London.

<sup>1</sup> Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 261-2. Hedges, R. Y., and Winterbottom, A., *The Legal History of Trade Unionism* (1930), pp. 52-57. Full accounts appeared in the *Beehive* and in the public press generally.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Minutes of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, 1867-71 (Webb Trade Union Collection, British Library of Political and Economic Science). L.T.C. minutes and annual report, 1866-67. *Report on the Various Proceedings taken by the London Trades Council and the Conference of Amalgamated Trades in reference to the Royal Commission on Trades' Unions, and other Subjects in connection therewith* (London, Sept. 1867). The conference held its first meeting on January 28, 1867.

<sup>3</sup> L.T.C. Annual Report, 1872-73.

There was practically no difference in policy-both parties wanted legislation to give security to trade union funds, working-class representation on the Royal Commission, and attendance of trade union representatives during its sittings. The differences-apart from those between the centralised amalgamated unions and the small local societies-were almost entirely personal. Potter was detested by the Junta as a 'mischievous meddler' who printed 'false and vicious statements' in the *Beehive*,<sup>1</sup> while Potter, though no doubt egotistical and fond of the limelight, was strongly opposed to the attempt by 'the Clique' to dictate over the whole trade union movement. He was anxious 'to let bygones be bygones' and to secure 'unity of action,' but the junta would have none of him and rejected his overtures.<sup>2</sup>

While the junta sought to retain close control in London, at the head of the trade union movement, convinced of their own wisdom and ability to see the crisis through, Potter sought to give a wider and more representative basis to the agitation. Immediately after the Queen's Bench decision in the *Horn by v. Close* case, a meeting of the L.W.M.A. decided to summon 'a conference of delegates from all the trade societies and trades councils of the United Kingdom to assemble in London' on March 5.<sup>3</sup> The necessity for such a conference was strongly confirmed soon afterwards by the Government's decision to appoint a Royal Commission of Inquiry into trade unions.' The Junta and London Trades Council, however, refused to participate. They considered that 'as the Commission ... has been appointed and agreed to by the House of Commons,' and the trades' council has, in conjunction with the Amalgamated Engineers, Iron Founders, Amalgamated Carpenters, Bricklayers, Bootmakers, etc., etc., had frequent interviews with members of Parliament, including Mr. Neate, regarding his bill now before the House to give protection to the funds of trade societies, and also having obtained from Mr. Walpole, Home Secretary, an opinion in favour of a representative of each society being present during the examination ... a conference is at the present time premature.'<sup>4</sup> Their underlying motive, however, was hatred of Potter

<sup>1</sup> L.T.C. Eighth Annual Report (1866-67).

<sup>2</sup> *Beehive*, Feb. 2 and March 9, 1867.

<sup>3</sup> *Beehive*, Feb. 2, 1867.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 9, 1867. See also the First Annual Report of the L.W.M.A. (*Beehive* April 20, 1867), in which Potter criticised the London Trades Council for its failure to summon a national conference.

<sup>5</sup> The trade union deputations had been unable to get working-class representation on the Commission, but the L.W.M.A. had secured the inclusion of the barrister, Frederic Harrison, who supported their case.

<sup>6</sup> L.T.C. minutes, March 4, 1867.

and his associates.' They considered `that the time for calling a conference will be when the Royal Commission present their report. Then we shall certainly do it, and hope that the societies generally will respond to the call."

Despite their opposition, however, the conference met in St. Martin's Hall, London, early in March 1867, and was attended by about 140 delegates representing nearly 200,000 members.<sup>3</sup> Nine trades councils-Edinburgh, Glasgow, Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester and Salford, Wolverhampton, Preston, Halifax, and Nottingham-were represented, together with most of the important trade unions in the Midlands and North, including the Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders, Ironworkers, Miners, Stonemasons, Cotton Spinners and Weavers, Tailors, Plasterers, and Flint Glass Makers, as well as many local societies. There were also representatives from about seventy London societies, mostly small, but including some larger ones, such as the compositors, tailors, bakers, brass finishers, painters, steam-engine makers, and shipwrights. Such an attendance was indeed evidence of `the general conviction of the desirability of such a conference, and of the urgency of the occasion for it,' despite the expressed opinion of the junta in the London Trades Council. It was, as the *Beehive* stated, 'one of the most numerous and influential ever known in the annals of trade unionists; it may truly be called a Parliament of Labour.' An effort, however, by the provincial delegates to settle the differences between the London Trades Council and the L.W.M.A. and secure unity of action resulted in failure, due to the junta's personal dislike and jealousy of Potter, and both the London Trades Council and the Conference of Amalgamated Trades refused to join in the conference

The conference lasted four days, from March 5 to 8. Its two chief demands were, firstly, legislation to give protection to trade union funds, and, secondly, permission for representatives to attend the

<sup>1</sup> *Beehive*, March 9, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> L.T.C. Eighth Annual Report (1866-67).

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Trades' Conference held at St. Martin's Hall on March 5, 6, 7 and 8, 1867* (London, 1867). This report is reprinted in an appendix to Davis, W. J., *History of the British Trades Union Congress* (1910). See also the *Beehive*, March 9, 1867, and Webb, S. and B., - *cit.*, pp. 272-73. Professor Cole's 'full list of societies represented' (*op. cit.*, pp. 15 and 23) is far from complete.

<sup>4</sup> *Beehive*, March 9, 1867. When a deputation of provincial delegates met the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, the latter denounced Potter and his followers as 'meddlers in trade matters and traders on the misfortunes of the working class.' The L.W.M.A. was said to contain 'anti-unionists,' who were not members of a trade society, and to be composed mostly of 'systematic political agitators.' (Minutes of Conf. of Amalg. Trades, March 8, 1867.) Many of the provincial delegates were not aware of the split in the metropolitan trades until they arrived in London.

sittings of the Royal Commission, to conduct the trade union case. A committee was elected to try to achieve these objects. Its members were Potter (L.W.M.A.), Proudfoot (Glasgow Trades Council), Wood (Manchester and Salford Trades Council), Macdonald (Miners' National Association), Kane (Ironworkers), Leigh (Cotton Operatives), Connolly (Stonemasons), Allen (Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders), Holmes (West Yorkshire Miners), and Leicester (Flint Glass Makers). The conference also urged that local trades' committees should be appointed, to collect evidence, summon public meetings, forward petitions, and generally assist the conference committee in putting the trade union case before the Royal Commission.

Thus there were now two rival bodies-the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, dominated by the junta, and the St. Martin's Hall Conference Committee-each claiming to represent the trade unions of the country in negotiations with the Royal Commission. Rival deputations put forward similar requests in March and both parties were eventually allowed to have representatives at the sittings of the Royal Commission. Robert Applegarth attended on behalf of the Junta, and Thomas Connolly, president of the Operative Stonemasons, represented the Conference Committee. The junta, however, aided by their middle-class friends on the Royal Commission, soon succeeded in elbowing the Conference Committee out of the way. An indiscreet speech by Connolly at a meeting of London trades' delegates on June 26, 1867, reflecting on J. A. Roebuck, one of the Commissioners, quickly led to his exclusion, and after that the Conference Committee ceased to take much interest in the proceedings of the Commission.' Neither did it take very active measures regarding agitation for the Bill which the conference had drawn up, to obtain the same legal security for trade union funds as was possessed by friendly societies. Its members, drawn from all parts of the country, could not, for lack of funds and for domestic and other reasons, remain continuously in London. The committee, therefore, soon faded out of existence. Reports of its activities ceased to appear in the *Beehive*, which stated in March 1868 that it had `not been called together for some months past' and was practically defunct.<sup>2</sup> Later on it was stated that it `came to grief

<sup>1</sup> *Beehive*, June 29, July 6, 13, 20, 27, Aug. 3, 10, and Nov. 23, 1867. See also the statement by Potter to the first T.U.C., in the *Manchester Guardian*, June 4, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> *Beehive*, March 28, 1868.

through apathy,' because of divisions among the trade union leaders, whereby 'both interest and confidence had been shaken', and because the societies failed to give adequate financial support, and 'the executive themselves lost heart.' 'After several well-intended meetings the lack of sympathy and the decline of funds necessitated a sort of break-up, and for months nothing has been done.' The junta or Conference of Amalgamated Trades, therefore, consisting of full-time union secretaries, resident in London, and backed by substantial funds, retained their leadership of the trade union Movement and management of the trade union case before the Royal Commission, their representative, Robert Applegarth, being allowed to remain throughout its proceedings.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the St. Martin's Hall Conference of March 1867 is important as 'the immediate forerunner' of the T.U.C.<sup>3</sup> It is evidence of the growing desire for some representative body to voice general trade union opinion, and of dissatisfaction with the narrow control of the junta, on the part not only of Potter and his metropolitan associates, but also of many provincial societies. The Conference Committee, which was a very representative body, strongly denounced the junta's attempted domination of the movement and their refusal, for reasons 'wholly and solely party and personal,' to join in a united front.' The junta's reasons for refusing to do so, however, were not entirely personal. The amalgamated societies, as we have seen, were more pacific in trade affairs and more concerned with friendly benefits than those in Potter's following, which were more disposed to strike action. The junta, anxious to put the moderate, conciliatory, friendly-society aspect of trade unionism before the Royal Commission, distrusted what they regarded as the 'wild men' in some of the London and provincial societies. Professor Cole has also suggested that the Junta's legislative claims were more limited than those of Potter and his allies: that they were mainly concerned with getting a legal status and protection for their friendly society funds, and not so much with securing legal recognition of picketing and strike action generally,

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 30, 1869.

<sup>3</sup> See Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 2638.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Address of the Conference Committee 'To the Operative Classes of the United Kingdom,' appended to the printed report of the St. Martin's Hall Conference. See also the *Beehive* March 16 and 23, 1867. The Manchester and Salford Trades Council passed a resolution regretting 'that the London Trades' Council have allowed their individual feelings to interfere with the performance of their public duties in preventing their constituents from being represented at the conference of trades' unions at London. (*Beehive*, April 20, 1867.)

which they were anxious to deprecate' There was undoubtedly something to support this suggestion at first. In September 1867, for example, the Conference of Amalgamated Trades was of opinion that it 'should confine its efforts to the promotion of such Bills as would ensure trades societies the full right to combine and to attach sick and other benefits to their trade benefits, to obtain legal protection for their funds and the right to invest such part of them as any society might ... determine (in land and buildings).' Many societies outside the Conference, however, were equally if not more concerned with securing legalisation of the right to strike and take other coercive action. It was this difference in policy which caused disagreement over Professor Neate's Bill in March 1867,<sup>3</sup> and which was to cause similar disagreement over the junta's Trade Societies' Bill in 1868. Eventually, however, as we shall see, as a result of the growing threat to trade unionism from further judicial decisions, the disagreement disappeared and the two parties united in their legislative demands.

Following on the *Hornby v. Close* case, the position of trade unions was made even more precarious by a series of legal decisions which almost completely crippled their power to strike and picket. One of the most notorious of these was that in *R. v. Drutt* (1867), resulting from an action brought by the London master tailors, following a strike, against the officers of the journeymen's trade society, whereby even 'black looks' could be interpreted as 'threatening,' 'intimidation,' or 'molestation.' It was followed by several similar decisions, which seemed to make almost any trade action by a union liable to prosecution for criminal conspiracy, despite the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1825.<sup>4</sup> There was an obvious need for united trade union action in the face of these threatening developments. The junta, therefore, took the lead with a vigorous policy to secure legislative remedy for these injustices and to acquire for trade unions a secure legal position. At first, as we have seen, their main aim was simply to obtain legal protection for trade union funds, and they therefore supported Professor Neate's Bill, but this fell through.' Then, with the advice and assistance of Professor Beesley, Henry Crompton,

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes, Sept. 30, 1867.

<sup>3</sup> Report of St. Martin's Hall Conference, *Beehive*, March 16, 1867.

<sup>4</sup> See Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 278-79, and Hedges and Winterbottom, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-51.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes of Conference of Amalgamated Trades, Feb. 14 and 21, and March 1, 1867, L.T.C. minutes, Feb. 20, 1867, and Annual Report, 1866-67. Report of the Various Proceedings taken by the London Trades Council and the Conference of Amalgamated Trades (Sept. 1867).

Frederic Harrison, and other legal and parliamentary friends, a Trade Societies' Bill was drawn up, which was intended to put the legality of trade unions beyond doubt, prevent them from being prosecuted under the law of conspiracy, and give them legal protection for their funds. This Bill they eventually got Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton to introduce into the House of Commons in July 1868.<sup>1</sup> By that time, however, the session was nearly over' and no further progress could be made. The Conference of Amalgamated Trades decided, in fact, 'that before any decided course could be taken the Conference would have to wait the issue of the Report of the Commission';' but the Bill, which the Conference had circulated to trade societies throughout the country, still remained the basis of trade union demands. Trade unionists were urged to use their newly-won political power under the 1867 Reform Act to press the Bill upon Parliamentary candidates when elections for the new Parliament were held.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FIRST CONGRESS, MANCHESTER, 1868

THE collapse of the committee appointed by the St. Martin's Hall Conference in March 1867 had left a clear field for the junta. The only other organisation that was representative of trade unions generally was the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades. This body made an attempt at its Preston conference, in September 1867, to get united action with the object of *obtaining* legal security for trade union funds and alteration of the common law of conspiracy as applied to trade unions. The executive were instructed 'to communicate with the trades' councils and other organised bodies' for this purpose, and a circular was to be issued 'inviting the co-operation of the whole of the trades of the country,' while the executive were also 'to inaugurate public meetings for the purpose of diffusing information amongst the operatives and other classes.'" By that time, however, the Alliance had dwindled almost into insignificance' and its appeal appears to have had little if any response. The trade *union* leadership remained in the hands of the junta.

Nevertheless, there was still a strong feeling among trade *unionists* for more united action and for a national trades' conference to voice their demands. Even the junta felt it, but they were in no hurry to summon such a conference. In a report which they issued to the trade unionists of the United Kingdom in September 1867, they described the actions which they had taken following the *Hornby v. Close* decision and the appointment of the Royal Commission, and stated that they would 'follow up the work we have been so much engaged in until the Royal Commission has completed its labours, and make known the result to the trades from time to time, or call a conference

<sup>1</sup> *United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades. Minutes of Conference held in the Spinners' and Minders' Institute, Preston, on Tuesday, September 24th, 1867, and the two following days. An address 'To the Trades of the Alliance and the Country Generally' was appended to this report.*

<sup>s</sup> See above, p. 18.

of the trades generally, should it be found necessary." In a later circular, of February 1868, the Conference of Amalgamated Trades and the London Trades Council stated that they would be prepared for 'calling a national conference on the situation of trades unions as soon as the Royal Commission presented their report or a [Government] Bill were introduced to parliament on the subject."

Potter and the L.W.M.A., however, and the provincial trades councils and trade societies were not prepared to wait indefinitely for another national conference. Early in March 1868, therefore, we find the L.W.M.A. putting forward a proposal for 'the convening of a National Labour Parliament in London' in the following May.' The L.W.M.A., however, unknown to itself, had been preceded by the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, which, about a fortnight previously, had put forward a similar proposal, for a national trades' congress in Manchester early in May.' When the L.W.M.A. heard of this, it at once decided to shelve its own scheme and gave its blessing to the proposed trades' congress.'

The proposal of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council was not for a national trades' conference to meet in a particular emergency, like those in 1864, 1866, and 1867, but for regular annual Trades Union Congresses, which would permanently represent and voice the opinions of the whole of the trades of the United Kingdom on all questions of general trade union interest. It was a natural development, of course, from the local trades' councils and the previous national trades' conferences, but someone had to suggest the idea. We know that the Manchester and Salford Trades Council issued the circular summoning the Congress, but who thought of it and what prompted it?

It originated out of the experience of William Dronfield, secretary of the Sheffield Typographical Society and also of the Sheffield Association and the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades. Dronfield was a very intelligent and enlightened trade unionist, who, as we have seen, had played a leading part in the agitation for amendment of the

<sup>1</sup> *Report on the various Proceedings taken by the London Trades Council and the Conference of Amalgamated Trades in reference to the Royal Commission on Trades' Unions and other subjects in connection therewith* (Sept. 1867). Minutes of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, Sept. 2, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> L.T.C. minutes, Jan. 10 and 21, and Feb. 18, 1868. Minutes of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, Jan. 10, 1868.

<sup>3</sup> *Beehive*, March 7, 1868, reporting on L.W.M.A. meeting of March 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, March 21 and 28, 1868.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, April 11, 1868.

Master and Servant Law and for the establishment of Courts of Conciliation and Arbitration.' It was he who had been mainly responsible for the summoning of the national trades' conference in Sheffield in July 1866, to deal with the question of lock-outs, and he had been elected secretary of the resulting United Kingdom Alliance. He had also been prominent at the St. Martin's Hall Conference in March 1867. He was energetic in the working-class movement for the franchise and for national education. He was a moderate, peace-loving man, strongly condemnatory of the 'rattening' outrages in Sheffield and determined to show that such crimes were limited to a few of the old-fashioned societies of degraded workers; for this reason he became secretary of the Sheffield Trades' Defence Committee and gave evidence before the Royal Commission.

It was to defend trade societies from the attacks being made upon them in the press that he had previously, in October 1865, attended and spoken before the Ninth Annual Congress of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (more briefly, the Social Science Association), which was held that year in Sheffield. This Association had displayed considerable interest in trade unionism, as evidenced by its very thorough report on *Trade Societies and Strikes*, in 1860, and the subject naturally came up for discussion in Sheffield, where it was then attracting so much publicity. A paper was read before the Department of Economy and Trade by one John Wilson, with the title, 'What are the best means of establishing a system of Authoritative Arbitration between Employers and Employed in cases of Strikes and Lock-outs?'<sup>2</sup> Wilson, a penknife bladegrinder employed by Messrs. Joseph Rodgers & Sons, of Sheffield, was a strong anti-unionist. He stated that he had 'stood aloof from trades' unions ... being a believer in free competition' and detesting 'interference with any man's labour.' He strongly denounced the policies of trade unions - their attempts at restricting the number of apprentices, their coercion of non-members, their 'ignorance of economical science,' and their failure in strikes. Moreover, he belied the title of his paper by condemning the proposed Courts of Conciliation and Arbitration as

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, *Transactions*, 1865 (Report of the Ninth Annual Meeting at Sheffield, Oct. 4-11, 1865), pp.

<sup>3</sup> He had been at one time a collector and committee member of the Pen-knife Bladegrinders' Society in Sheffield, but, so it was stated at the end of 1866, 'for years past, both in public and private, [he] has been one of the most determined opponents of the doings of the Sheffield Trades' Unions.' (Report of L.T.C. deputation to investigate the Sheffield 'outrages,' Nov. 1866.)

futile, believing in 'the doctrine of non-intervention,' i.e., in 'leaving masters and men to settle their disputes between themselves . . . without the intervention of third parties.'

Dronfield followed him with a paper in defence of trade unions, but this was omitted from the Association's report, which merely states that 'in addition to the paper by Mr. Wilson ... Mr. Dronfield read a paper pointing out the advantages of trades' unions.' There follows in the report a summary of the discussion upon this question, including speeches by Frederic Harrison, Professor Fawcett, and Thomas Hughes, generally in favour of arbitration, in order to avoid strikes and lock-outs, and also of voluntary combinations of workmen, but critical of trade union abuses-their extreme wage demands, coercion of non-members, and physical violence.

Dronfield was highly incensed at the unfairly biased attitude of the Social Science Association. Not only was his paper omitted from its *Transactions*, while his opponent was given several pages, but in the report of the ensuing discussion, in which a number of Sheffield trades' representatives took part, 'not a word they said is recorded.' What was the use, then, of working men attending such meetings, 'if we cannot get justice done to us-if we cannot get our views represented -if when we express ourselves, either by writing papers, or in attempting to reply to the attacks made upon us, we are ignored in the official documents of the Society?' Since such middle and upper-class bodies denied them a fair hearing and report, trade unionists must rely on their own organisation to defend themselves. It was partly, no doubt, with this in mind that Dronfield summoned the national trades' conference in Sheffield in 1866.

Dronfield's experience and his conclusions made a great impression on two of the leading officials of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, Samuel Caldwell Nicholson, president, and William Henry Wood, secretary. Both these men were, like Dronfield, journeymen compositors, being treasurer and secretary respectively of the Manchester Typographical Society. They knew Dronfield well, having met him several times both on printing and on general trade union affairs. Wood had been the more prominent of the two, having

attended and taken a leading part in the national trades' conferences in 1866 (Sheffield) and 1867 (London). It was Nicholson, however, who suggested the idea of an annual Trades Union Congress. The way in which it occurred to him is described in his obituary in the *Typographical Circular* of February 1891. Having heard of Dronfield's experience with the Social Science Association's Annual Congress at Sheffield, 'Mr. Nicholson remarked, "Why not have a congress of our own?" and he at once, along with a few of his colleagues, set about to organise the first congress.' The need for such a meeting was obvious in the present position of trade unions-deprived of legal protection for their funds, prosecuted as illegal conspiracies, threatened by the Royal Commission, and blackened by prejudiced and ignorant attacks in the public press and elsewhere. There was no national body in existence properly representative of trade unions and able to speak and act for the whole Movement, to direct and focus trade union opinion and lend strength to union demands. The Conference of Amalgamated Trades in London was doing good work, but it was a cliquish and dictatorial body, by no means representative of the whole trade union Movement.

So the Manchester and Salford Trades Council issued a circular summoning the first annual Trades Union Congress. This summons, the Webbs have informed us, was dated April 16, 1868, and was only preserved to posterity by the fortunate fact that it was reprinted in the *Ironworkers' Journal* of May 1868, no original copy apparently having survived; for which reason they reprinted it again in an appendix to their *History of Trade Unionism*, from which it has been reproduced by later writers. It is quite clear, however, from the *Beehive* and other sources, that this was not, in fact, a copy of the original summons, but of a second and revised one. The first summons was reprinted in the *Beehive* on March 21, 1868, and was evidently issued towards the end of February. The present author therefore searched the records of the Manchester Typographical Society and in 1955 fortunately discovered an actual copy, dated February 21, 1868, proposing a 'Congress of Trades Councils and other Federations of

<sup>1</sup> Armytage, W. H. G., A. J. Mundella, 182.-1897: *the Liberal Background to the Labour Movement* (1951), p. 49, states incorrectly that Dronfield 'was forbidden to read a paper which he had prepared in defence of the unions.' Cf. his article on Dronfield in *Notes and Queries*, 1948.  
<sup>2</sup> Statement by Dronfield in the *Report of the Conference of Trades' Delegates of the United Kingdom* (Sheffield, July 1866) pp. 69-70.

<sup>1</sup> The reprint in the *Beehive* is undated. The *Beehive* did not get news of the circular until two or three weeks after it was issued. Hartwell stated at the second annual meeting of the L.W.M.A. in April that the Manchester and Salford Trades Council called a Trades Union Congress a fortnight before the L.W.M.A. decided, on March 3, to summon a 'National Labour Parliament.' (*Beehive*, April 7, 1868.) The circular was read to the Conference of Amalgamated Trades on March 16, 1868 (Minutes).



# PROPOSED CONGRESS OF TRADES COUNCILS

AND OTHER

## Federations of Trades Societies.

MANCHESTER, FEBRUARY 21st, 1868.

FELLOW-UNIONISTS,

The Manchester and Salford Trades Council having recently taken into their serious consideration the present aspect of Trades Unions, and the profound ignorance which prevails in the public mind with reference to their operations and principles, together with the probability of an attempt being made by the Legislature, during the present session of Parliament, to introduce a measure detrimental to the interests of such Societies, beg most respectfully to suggest the propriety of holding in Manchester, as the main centre of industry in the provinces, a Congress of the Representatives of Trades Councils and other similar Federations of Trades Societies. By confining the Congress to such bodies it is conceived that a deal of expense will be saved, as Trades will thus be represented collectively; whilst there will be a better opportunity afforded of selecting the most intelligent and efficient exponents of our principles.

It is proposed that the Congress shall assume the character of the annual meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Social Science Association, in the transactions of which Societies the artisan class are almost entirely excluded; and that papers, previously carefully prepared, shall be laid before the Congress on the various subjects which at the present time affect Trades Societies, each paper to be followed by discussion upon the points advanced, with a view of the merits and demerits of each question being thoroughly ventilated through the medium of the public press. It is further suggested that the subjects treated upon shall include the following:—

- 1.—Trades Unions an absolute necessity.
- 2.—Trades Unions and Political Economy.
- 3.—The Effect of Trades Unions on Foreign Competition.
- 4.—Regulation of the Hours of Labour.
- 5.—Limitation of Apprentices.
- 6.—Technical Education.
- 7.—Arbitration and Courts of Conciliation.
- 8.—Co-operation.
- 9.—The present Inequality of the Law in regard to Conspiracy, Intimidation, Picketing, Coercion, &c.
- 10.—Factory Acts Extension Bill, 1867: the necessity of Compulsory Inspection, and its application to all places where Women and Children are employed.
- 11.—The present Royal Commission on Trades Unions: how far worthy of the confidence of the Trades Union interest.
- 12.—The necessity of an Annual Congress of Trade Representatives from the various centres of industry.

All Trades Councils and other Federations of Trades are respectfully solicited to intimate their adhesion to this project on or before the 6th of April next, together with a notification of the subject of the paper that each body will undertake to prepare; after which date all information as to place of meeting, &c., will be supplied.

It is also proposed that the Congress be held on the 4th of May next, and that all liabilities in connection therewith shall not extend beyond its sittings.

Communications to be addressed to Mr. W. H. Wood, Typographical Institute, 29, Water Street, Manchester.

By order of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council,

S. C. NICHOLSON, PRESIDENT.  
W. H. WOOD, SECRETARY.

Trades Societies"

'The Manchester and Salford Trades Council,' this circular began, 'having recently taken into their serious consideration the present aspect of Trades Unions, and the profound ignorance which prevails in the public mind with reference to their operations and principles, together with the probability of an attempt being made by the Legislature, during the present session of Parliament, to introduce a measure detrimental to the interests of such Societies, beg most respectfully to suggest the propriety of holding in Manchester, as the main centre of industry in the provinces, a Congress of the Representatives of Trades Councils and other similar Federations of Trades Societies. By confining the Congress to such bodies it is conceived that a deal of expense will be saved, as Trades will thus be represented collectively; whilst there will be a better opportunity afforded of selecting the most intelligent and efficient exponents of our principles.' No invitation, in other words, was sent to individual trade societies in this first circular, but only to 'Trades Councils and other similar Federations of Trades Societies.'

The name 'Congress' for the proposed meeting had sometimes been applied to earlier trades' conferences, but it is fairly certain that in 1868 it was derived from the 'Annual Congresses' of the Social Science Association. Indeed, not only was the name borrowed, but the same conference procedure was to be adopted. It was proposed that the Trades Union Congress should 'assume the character of the annual meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Social Science Association,' in the transactions of which Societies the artisan class are almost entirely excluded; and that papers, previously carefully prepared, shall be laid before the Congress on the various subjects which at the present time affect Trade Societies, each paper to be followed by discussion upon the points advanced, with a view of the merits and demerits of each question being thoroughly ventilated through the medium of the public press.'

It was suggested that the following subjects should be brought before the Congress:

<sup>1</sup> This document was subsequently donated by the Manchester Typographical Society to the Trades Union Congress.

<sup>2</sup> There seems to be no very clear reason why the British Association or the Advancement of Science was mentioned in this circular, along with the Social Science Association. Trade unionists appear neither to have had nor to have desired any part in its proceedings. In the second, revised, circular only the Social Science Association was referred to.

1. Trades Unions an absolute necessity.
2. Trades Unions and Political Economy.
3. The Effect of Trades Unions on Foreign Competition.
4. Regulation of the Hours of Labour.
5. Limitation of Apprentices.
6. Technical Education.
7. Arbitration and Courts of Conciliation.
8. Co-operation.
9. The present Inequality of the Law in regard to Conspiracy, Intimidation, Picketing, Coercion, &c.

Factory Acts Extension Bill, 1867: the necessity of Compulsory Inspection, and its application to all places where Women and Children are employed.

11. The present Royal Commission on Trades Unions: how far worthy of the confidence of the Trades Union interest.
12. The necessity of an Annual Congress of Trade Representatives from the various centres of industry.'

'All Trades Councils and other Federations of Trades' were respectfully solicited to intimate their adhesion to this project on or before the 6th of April next, together with a notification of the subject of the paper that each body will undertake to prepare.' It was proposed 'that the Congress be held on the 4th of May next, and that all liabilities in connection therewith shall not extend beyond its sittings'. Communications were to be addressed to Mr. W. H. Wood, Typographical Institute, 29 Water Street, Manchester. The circular was signed, by order of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, S. C. Nicholson, president, and W. H. Wood, secretary.

The reprint of this circular in the *Beehive* differed on one or two points from this original document, which may possibly have been a proof copy, to which minor alterations and additions were made. These referred particularly to the expected trade-union legislation, 'which might prove detrimental' to their interests, it was emphasised, unless some prompt and decisive action be taken by the working classes themselves'. The list of proposed subjects for discussion, moreover, included an additional item on the 'Legalisation of trade societies', to follow the debate on the Royal Commission. The duration of the Congress, it was also added, was 'not to exceed six days'. The other alterations were merely slight verbal ones.

At the quarterly meeting of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council on April 16, however, it was decided to postpone the Congress until June 2, in Whit-week, 'in order to afford sufficient time for all the various trade organisations to send delegates and prepare papers.'" It was also decided 'that all trades feeling inclined to send delegates should be at liberty to do so'; in other words, the invitation to the Congress was now extended to include individual societies as well as trades councils and other federations. It seems probable that this decision was made owing to lack of support for the Congress as originally planned, or else to make it a more impressive gathering.

Another circular, therefore, was immediately prepared, dated April 16, 1868, and issued to 'Trades Councils, Federations of Trades, and Trade Societies Generally.' It was this which was printed in the *Ironworkers' Journal* of May 1868, and which the Webbs have reprinted. It was also, unnoticed by the Webbs and apparently by all later trade union historians, printed in the *Beehive* of April 25, 1868. Except for the revisions mentioned, it was very little different from the original circular.

There was, as George Howell has pointed out, an important difference between these proposed annual Congresses and earlier schemes like that of the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades. In the latter organisations 'the main object . . . was some form of amalgamation or federation. The promoters and founders of Trade Union Congresses had no such ambition. Their object was to confer annually, upon urgent questions affecting workmen and labour associations, whether the result of legislation or otherwise . . . to promote co-operation in respect of general questions affecting labour, and watch over its interests in Parliament. The Congress would in no way affect the existing organisation and independence of trade unions or interfere in the legitimate work of trade unions.'<sup>2</sup> It might therefore be expected to secure more general support than the earlier schemes involving federation or amalgamation.

The junta, however, appear to have regarded the proposed Trades Union Congress with disfavour, as a rival to their own authority<sup>3</sup>, and

<sup>2</sup> *Beehive*, April 18, 1868.

<sup>3</sup> Howell, G., *Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders (1905)*, vol. i, p. 177. See also his article in the *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 14, 1882.

<sup>4</sup> When the Manchester and Salford Trades Council's circular was read to the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, 'the Secretary was instructed to write for further information respecting it' (Minutes, March 16, 1868), but there is nothing more about it in the minutes. There is no mention whatever of the Congress in the minutes of the London Trades Council.

only two metropolitan representatives, George Potter and a delegate from the small London Pressmen's Society, attended it. Provincial trades councils were strongly represented—Manchester and Salford, Liverpool, Sheffield, Birmingham, Bradford, Preston, Bolton, Warrington, Nottingham, Dundee, and Dublin. The only provincial trade unions of any importance to send delegates were the Amalgamated Ironworkers (John Kane), the Amalgamated Tailors (Peter Shorrocks and J. Adamson), the Ironfounders (A. Ridge), the Masons (T. Davies), the Amalgamated Joiners (F. Booker), the Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders (C. Hutchinson), and the Flint Glass Makers (T. J. Wilkinson). Moreover, most of these men were from Lancashire towns and may not, in fact, have been sent by their national executives. The other delegates were from local societies or branches of bricklayers, painters, printers, and dyers in Manchester, Liverpool, and a few other Lancashire towns, with one or two from small societies farther afield, like the Yorkshire Glass Bottle Makers. Altogether there were thirty-four delegates, who claimed to represent 118,367 members.<sup>1</sup>

The Congress was held in the Mechanics' Institute, David Street, Manchester, during Whit-week, from Tuesday, June 2, to Saturday, June 6, 1868. Samuel Nicholson, president of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council and originator of the Congress, should have presided, but he had to attend the Annual Moveable Delegation of the Order of Druids (of which he was general secretary), which was being held in Derby that same week. In his absence, W. H. Wood, secretary of the Trades Council, was elected president. Papers were read, followed by discussion, on all the various subjects listed in the summons to the Congress. The most important were naturally those concerning the Royal Commission and the legal position of trade unions. On these, despite the aloof attitude of the junta, resolutions were passed, largely due to John Kane's influence, supporting the policy and action of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades in London. The Congress expressed the 'suspicion and disfavour' with which the great majority of trade unions regarded the Royal Commission, 'both in regard to the unfair composition and also to its

<sup>1</sup> William Dronfield, representing the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades, was one of the most prominent delegates.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed reports of its proceedings are to be found in the *Manchester Guardian* and *Courier* and in the *Beehive*. *Manchester Courier*, June 2, 1868. Davis (*op. cit.*, p. 2) lists him, wrongly, among the delegates at the Congress.

one-sided, and to a great extent secret, proceedings.' It pledged itself, in the name of the societies represented, 'to aid the London Committee of Amalgamated Trades in their laudable effort to secure the legal protection of trade societies' funds,' and declared 'its firm determination to continue the agitation, and to make the support of this measure a condition with candidates for parliamentary honours before we give any pledge of support or vote at the ensuing election.' It also resolved 'that the influence of this Congress shall be directed to aiding the London Conference of Amalgamated Trades in their endeavours to alter the third section of the act of the 6th of George IV [1825], cap. 129, the object being to amend the law in regard to conspiracy, intimidation, picketing, coercion, &c., which is ... capable of such misconstructions that it is utterly impossible that justice can be done.'

Thus the trade union leadership was still left in the hands of the Junta, the Congress making no attempt to appoint a permanent committee of its own. The Congress does not appear to have excited very much notice or to have had much influence on the course of events. John Pullon, secretary of the Nottingham Typographical Society and Trades Council, in a paper which he prepared for the second Congress in Birmingham, on 'What means are the best to make the Congresses permanently successful?', stated that, 'regarding my own immediate neighbourhood, a knowledge of the business of that Congress [the first one, in Manchester] and acquaintance with the papers read, has been obtained by the working class community only so far as the delegate was able to give his report to the trades' council, and only so far as the ephemeral daily sheets of news have thought well to give their epitomised reports. And where now is the influence sent abroad and evoked by the papers and discussions which characterised that meeting? Echo says, "Where?".' This, he considered, was because a Congress committee had not been appointed 'to meet between Congress and Congress' and 'carry out the views adopted by the Congress, and give them wider scope and influence among our fellow men.'

The first Congress, in fact, as George Howell later pointed out, was of a 'preliminary character.... The delegates attending it were but feeling their way to a more permanent organisation." Indeed, 'it was

<sup>1</sup> *Beehive*, Jan. 1, 1870. The paper was not, however, read at the Congress.

<sup>2</sup> "Trades Union Congresses and Social Legislation," *Contemporary Review*, Sept. 1889, p. 405.

hardly expected even by the most sanguine of the promoters of the gathering that the one then being held would really constitute the first of a continuous series, though that was the dream and the hope of the originators of the movement." The Congress did, however, pass a resolution `That it is highly desirable that the trades of the United Kingdom should hold an annual congress, for the purpose of bringing the trades into closer alliance, and to take action in all Parliamentary matters pertaining to the general interests of the working classes.' It was therefore decided `that the next congress should be held at Birmingham, the time to be left to the Birmingham Trades' Council."

<sup>1</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 14, 1882.  
*Beehive*, June 13, 1868.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE T.U.C. BECOMES AN ESTABLISHED NATIONAL ORGANISATION

**T**HE Conference of Amalgamated Trades in London seems to have paid scant attention to the Manchester Congress. The next month, in fact, it was itself proposing to summon a national conference, as previously promised: this it would do 'at the most fitting time, which, probably, will be at the beginning of the Session of the new Parliament.'" The junta had by now greatly strengthened their position in London, and Potter and his allies were finding it increasingly difficult to oppose them. The circulation of the *Beehive* had been seriously affected by the junta's enmity, and the Trades' Newspaper Company had fallen into debt and was unable to pay any dividend to its shareholders, while many of its shares remained unsold.' Potter was therefore forced into dropping his hostility to the Junta and making repeated appeals for trade union unity and support. The *Beehive* would, in future, `endeavour to draw in one united body all those labouring in the ranks of industry; to heal those unhappy differences which have so long existed amongst the representatives of the working classes.... This can only be done by mutual forbearance and conciliation; and we trust that all those in our ranks who, from whatever cause, may have differed from us, will cordially unite in our support.... As one means to the above end, all personalities will be excluded from our columns."

This change of heart, coupled with the growing threat to trade unionism from successive judicial decisions, brought about a reconciliation between the junta and their opponents, and on August 22, 1868, it was reported in the *Beehive* that `the leaders of the large trade societies in the metropolis have at last awakened to a sense of the danger, and are taking active measures for calling together a conference of delegates from every trade society in the metropolitan

<sup>1</sup> *Circular of July 1868.*  
<sup>2</sup> *Beehive*, June 20, 1868.  
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1868.

district, for the purpose of considering what measures shall be adopted to meet the present crisis; and, what is still more important, that the two parties into which the union leaders of London are unhappily divided, will on this occasion—and we trust always in the future—act in concert together, and that the circular convening the delegates will bear the signatures of the leading members of the Amalgamated Conference Trades, the Trades' Council, and the Working Men's Association.' In the next number (August 2<sup>o</sup>), however, it was regretted that 'the arrangement has fallen through,' and the L.W.M.A. therefore expressed its intention of summoning a trades' conference on its own responsibility. But the differences were eventually removed and a circular was issued summoning a delegate meeting of the whole of the London trades at the Bell Inn, Old Bailey, on Wednesday, October 14, 1868. The signatories included Allan, Applegarth, Guile, Odger, Coulson, Potter, Dunning, Howell, Shipton, and Leicester. As the *Beehive* said, 'It is a long time since those names appeared in unison together; and ... it shows the gravity of the crisis which has brought about the union.'

The main purpose of this meeting was to consider the Trade Societies' Bill, promoted by the junta, which had been introduced into the Commons at the end of the last session. There was sharp difference of opinion on the third clause, defining criminal action by trade unions, but, after several adjourned meetings, the Bill was eventually adopted. In March 1869, however, the reports of the Royal Commission on trades' unions were presented to Parliament, and, since the Government declined to take immediate legislative action, Frederic Harrison drew up a new Bill, based on the minority report.<sup>1</sup> This Bill would get rid of the objectionable third clause in the old Bill by abolishing all special criminal legislation in regard to trade unions and bringing them under the common law, while it would also enable trade unions, by registering under the Friendly Societies' Acts, to secure legal protection for their funds. It was therefore adopted by the Conference of Amalgamated Trades in place of the old Bill, and arrangements were made for summoning another delegate meeting of the London trades at the Sussex Hotel, Bouverie

<sup>1</sup> *Beehive*, Sept. 26 and Oct. 3, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 24, and 31, 1868.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, April 17, 1869. Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 274-75.

Street, on April 28<sup>1</sup>

The junta did not, it is to be noticed, fulfil their previous promises to summon a national trades' conference. They decided merely to issue another circular 'to the trades societies of the United Kingdom ... explaining the intentions of the Conference with reference to the Bill now before the House.' It was also evident that the rift in the London trades had not been completely closed, for the L.W.M.A. also summoned delegate meetings of the London trades at the Bell Inn, Old Bailey, on April 13 and 20. The delegates at these meetings represented [London] societies at the large conference held at St. Martin's Hall in 1867." The *Beehive* deplored the continuing disunity in the London trades, and at the same time Frederic Harrison and other legal advisers of the junta urged the necessity for united trades' action. The result was that the Conference of Amalgamated Trades invited the delegates of the other trades to their meeting on April 28<sup>6</sup>. Here, at last, unity was achieved.' A resolution was unanimously adopted in favour of the Bill, which had been introduced into the Commons by Messrs. Hughes and Mundella on April 10, and it was decided to hold a great aggregate meeting of the London trades in its support; meanwhile, M.P.s would have to be lobbied and a political campaign organised. To carry out this work a committee was appointed, consisting of Potter, Howell, Druitt, Dunning, and Broadhurst, to act with the committee of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, comprising Allan, Applegarth, Odger, Guile, and Coulson.'

The London trades' meeting was held in Exeter Hall on June 22, when it was decided to send a deputation to Mr. Bruce, the Home Secretary, 'to solicit the support of the Government to this Bill.' The new Parliament, elected under the 1867 Reform Act in November 1868, contained a large Liberal majority, and trade unionists had high hopes of favourable treatment from the new Ministry of

<sup>1</sup> Minutes, April 1869.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes, April 19, 1869.

<sup>3</sup> *Beehive*, April 17 and 24, 1869.

<sup>4</sup> Earlier on Potter had proposed another national conference like that of 1867, to consider the Royal Commission's report (*Beehive*, Jan. 30, 1869), but his proposal had fallen flat.

<sup>5</sup> *Beehive*, April 24, 1869. Minutes of Conference of Amalgamated Trades, April 19, 1869.

<sup>6</sup> *Beehive*, May 1, 1869.

<sup>7</sup> Note that this establishment of trade union unity was accompanied by a similar consolidation in the working class political movement, with the establishment in Aug. 1869 of the Labour Representation League, 'a central association embodying all sections of the London working men, to secure the return of practical working men to Parliament.' The League's executive committee included Allan, Applegarth, Conolly, Coulson, Guile, Harry, Howell, Newton, Odger, and Potter. *Beehive*, Aug. 7 and 21, 1869. Humphrey, *History of Labour Representation*, (1912), p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Beehive*, June 26, 1869.

Mr. Gladstone. The Government, however, wished to give further consideration to the question of trade union legislation, and eventually Messrs. Hughes and Mundella agreed to drop their Bill, after a formal second reading on July 7, on the understanding that the Government would at once pass a temporary measure giving legal protection to trade union funds, and would introduce a complete trade union Bill next session.'

Meanwhile, the Birmingham Trades Council, in accordance with the decision of the first Trades Union Congress in Manchester, was making preparations for the second annual Congress to be held in Birmingham.' The circular summoning it was issued at the end of March or early in April 1869, stating that it would meet on June 21.' The response, however, does not appear to have been very encouraging, while many societies which did reply asked for more time, so a second circular was sent out in May announcing postponement of the Congress to August 23' Other reasons for the postponement were that 'important questions affecting the trade unions were pending in the legislature,' and that the Trades Council wished 'to avoid collision with a gathering in London of a similar character,' that of the London trades on June 22.

The Congress met in Birmingham, in the Odd Fellows' Hall, Upper Temple Street, on August 23-28, 1869.' It was a more representative assembly than the first one in Manchester. There were forty-seven delegates present, representing forty societies with a total membership of 250,000. The London Trades Council sent George Odger, and George Howell got himself elected by the Paddington lodge of the Bricklayers' Society, considering that it would be 'a disgrace not to have our Society represented there.'" William Cremer and William Harry attended as representatives of the Marylebone and Chelsea Working Men's Associations, and Thomas Connolly, of the Stonemasons, also came from London. Apart from these, however, and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, July 3 and 10, 1869. Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, p. 275. A temporary Trades' Unions (Protection of Funds) Act was immediately passed. *Beehive*, Aug. 7, 1869. Hedges and Winterbottom, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-59. *Beehive*, Feb. 13, 1869.

<sup>2</sup> Circular summoning the Second Annual Congress of Trades' Councils and Trade Societies Generally (Birmingham, March 27, 1869). *Beehive*, April 24, 1869.

<sup>3</sup> *Beehive*, May 29 and July 24, 1869.

<sup>4</sup> Report of Congress by R. S. Kirk.

<sup>5</sup> Report of Congress in *Beehive*, Aug. 28, 1869.

<sup>6</sup> *The Second Annual Congress of Trades' Unions, held on August 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28, 1869, in the Odd Fellows' Hall, Upper Temple Street, Birmingham. Specially reported by R. S. Kirk* (Birmingham, 1869). Lengthy reports are

<sup>7</sup> The Bricklayers' executive had refused to appoint him, as 'the expence [would be too much].' Howell paid and arranged his expenses, except for his railway fare. Howell Letters (Bishopsgate Institute, July 20, 26, 27, and 31, Aug. 9, 1869).

George Potter, the Congress was again a mainly provincial affair. There were delegates from the trades councils of Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Preston, the Potteries, and Dublin, and also from a number of important national trade unions, including the Ironworkers, Miners, Stonemasons, Tailors, and Flint Glass Makers, and from several smaller and local societies, while representatives were admitted from other working class bodies such as the Co-operative Movement, the Labour Representation League, and the National Education and Emigration Leagues.

The main subject of discussion at the Congress, of course, was the Royal Commission's report and proposed trade union legislation. A resolution was again passed, proposed by George Howell, in support of the policy of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, demanding 'that in any attempt at legislation with regard to trades' unions, the following principles shall be distinctly recognised: 1. Entire repeal of the combination laws. 2. Complete protection of funds. 3. No interference with, nor attempt to separate, benefit from trade funds.

4. That in respect of the recommendation of the Commission to compel registration of trade rules and open accounts, this Congress would be against any exceptional clause in this respect from that enforced in regard to other legal societies of the country.' It was also decided 'to appoint a committee to prepare a statement, in accordance with this and other resolutions, to go out to the world, to the trades' unions and legislators, as to the reasons why we hold the opinions therein contained.' This committee was to consist of the Congress officers (Wilkinson, Flint Glass Makers, president; Kane, Amalgamated Ironworkers, vice-president; and McRae, Birmingham Trades Council, secretary), together with Horrocks (Amalgamated Tailors), Owen (Potteries Trade Council), Howell (Operative Bricklayers), Clare (Dublin Association of Trades), and Bailey (Preston Trades Council). William Cremer had strongly urged the appointment of a Congress committee 'to watch legislation next year,' since it 'would far better represent the national will than a committee sitting in London'; but the Congress resolution did not go so far. Davis states in his *History of the British Trades Union Congress* (p. 9) that this Congress appointed the first 'Parliamentary Committee,' the forerunner of the modern General Council, with a central office which was to be in London, in order to watch and promote labour legislation,

trades for the body politic of trade unionists.' It is clear, however, that the resolution which the Congress actually passed, though by drafting Bills, lobbying M.P.s, interviewing Ministers, and generally assuming 'authority for voicing the opinion of the organised appointing a sort of embryo 'Parliamentary Committee,' did not go anything like so far as Davis asserts. It only established a temporary committee 'to prepare a statement' after the Congress, publicising and explaining the resolutions which had been passed. Nevertheless, George Odger appears to have considered that such a committee might become a rival to the Conference of Amalgamated Trades and he therefore declined to serve upon it. There is no evidence, however, of this committee holding any meetings in the interval between the Birmingham Congress and the next one.

Other subjects of general trade union interest which were discussed at the Congress, and upon which resolutions were passed, included 'Justification of Trade Unions,' 'Trade Unions, Political Economy, and Foreign Competition,' reduction of the hours of labour, apprentice limitation, strikes and lock-outs, factory legislation, co-operative production, primary education, the necessity of working class newspapers, and 'Labour Representation' in the House of Commons.

According to the *Beehive* report, it was decided that the next Congress should be held in London and that the summoning and arrangements for it 'should be left in the hands of the London Trades Council.' In fact, a committee was appointed consisting of the London delegates, Potter, Howell, Cremer, Harry, and Odger, 'to co-operate with the London Trades Council' in making arrangements for the Congress.' The decision to hold the Congress in London was 'on account of the opportunities it would afford (the Congress being held during the session) of waiting upon Members of Parliament.' No date was fixed, but the Congress would be arranged to coincide with the introduction into Parliament of the Government's promised Trade Union Bill.<sup>3</sup>

There was nothing, in fact, that the trade unions could now do but await this Bill, and the Conference of Amalgamated Trades therefore

held no meetings between April 1869 (when it completed preparations for the London trades' meeting on June 22) and February 1870. In the interim, however, the junta finally got Potter and his associates under their thumb by acquiring control of the *Beehive*.' This achievement was given the appearance of an alliance. All differences, it was stated, had disappeared and 'the leaders of the various organised sections of working men now stand together to do battle, side by side, for the benefit of their class.' A joint committee representing the whole of the London trades had, as we have seen, been appointed at the delegate meeting on April 28, 1869, and when the Conference of Amalgamated Trades met again in February 1870, its membership was extended to include the delegates of the other London trades appointed at that meeting, including Potter, Howell, Broadhurst, Dunning, and a number of others. But Potter had by this time been completely muzzled. The *Beehive*, which had been running at a loss, had now been brought under the control of a new management committee, including the leading members of the junta-Allan, Applegarth, Odger, and Guile-together with others such as Howell, Cremer, and R. M. Latham, President of the Labour Representation League, while Potter had been made secretary instead of manager. To increase the paper's circulation, it was decided to reduce its price from twopence to a penny and to alter its form and contents. This would necessitate £10,000 of new capital, which was to be provided by the large trade unions, the Labour Representation League, and the Co-operative Societies. Potter was to be 'assisted' in the editorial work by the Rev. Henry Solly, nominee of the junta, best known for his foundation of Trades' Halls and Working Men's Clubs and Institutes, and once an adherent of the middle-class wing of the Chartist Movement.<sup>2</sup> It seems, in fact, from the change in the tone and contents of the *Beehive* from now on, that Potter had actually been superseded by that reverend gentleman, and though he continued for a few years to stand among the trade union leaders the real power now rested almost unchallenged in the hands of the junta.

The trade union world anxiously awaited in 1870 the introduction of the Trade Union Bill promised by the Government, but the Parliamentary session passed and no such Bill appeared. Early in

<sup>1</sup> Circulars distributed by the committee in Aug. and Oct. 1870. See also Howell's article in the *Contemporary Review*, Sept. 1889, p. 406.

<sup>2</sup> *Beehive*, Sept. 4, 1869.

<sup>3</sup> L.T.C. minutes, March 12, 1870.

<sup>1</sup> *Beehive*, Dec. 11, 1869.  
<sup>2</sup> *Beehive*, Feb. 12, 187

August, therefore, the Conference of Amalgamated Trades sent a deputation to the Home Secretary, who informed them that a Bill would be brought in at the beginning of the next session, and that meanwhile the temporary Act for the protection of trade union funds would be renewed. The Conference therefore adjourned 'until such time as it was necessary to hold a meeting.'

Meanwhile, however, the provincial trades councils and trade societies were getting impatient for the summoning of the annual Congress to be held that year in London, and the committee appointed at Birmingham therefore issued a circular in August announcing that the Congress would meet on October 24.<sup>1</sup> When October arrived, however, another circular was issued stating that, 'after a more matured determination with the representatives of the large societies on the subject,' the committee had decided to postpone the Congress until 'the first Monday after the Bill is before Parliament.'" The reason for this decision was that, if they waited until the Bill was introduced into Parliament the following session, the Congress could be held concurrently with the second reading and the delegates would be able, if necessary, to lobby M.P.s and make representations to the Home Secretary. To hold a Congress now would involve useless expense and might militate against the success of the one which would certainly have to be held soon afterwards, when the Bill was brought in.

The Government Trade Union Bill was at last introduced in February 1871 'It was a disappointing measure, fulfilling trade union fears and dashing most of their hopes. It would, it is true, grant full legal recognition to trade unions and enable them to secure protection for their funds by registration under the Friendly Societies Act; but, by its third clause, it would still leave trade unionists liable to criminal prosecution for such vague, undefined acts as 'molesting,' 'obstructing,' 'threatening,' 'intimidating,' and so on, as under the ambiguous 1825 Act and later judicial decisions. A storm of indignation, therefore, immediately arose in the trade union world against the criminal section of the Bill, and to give nation-wide expression to this feeling and to bring pressure upon Parliament the third Trades Union

Congress was now summoned to meet in London, in the Portland Rooms, Foley Street, Marylebone, on Monday, March 6, to coincide with the second reading of the Bill.' This Congress was the first really national one, being attended, despite the very short notice, by delegates from forty-nine societies, representing 289,430 members.<sup>2</sup> The unions represented included most of the important ones—Engineers, Miners, Ironworkers, Ironfounders, Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders, Cotton Spinners, Carpenters and Joiners, Stonemasons, Bricklayers, Tailors, Shoemakers, and Flint Glass Makers—and there were also representatives from the trades' councils in London, Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Preston, Oldham, the Potteries, and Maidstone. The Conference of Amalgamated Trades, now combining almost all the London trades, was strongly represented, and many of the leading provincial unionists were also there.

The main, almost exclusive, concern of the Congress was the Government Bill, the criminal section of which was strongly denounced. A deputation was appointed to wait on the Home Secretary, but got no satisfaction, so it was decided to appoint a committee 'to work with the committee of the Amalgamated Trades' in organising political agitation against the Bill. Thus was established the first permanent committee—the 'Parliamentary Committee'—of the Trades Union Congress. It was to consist of Alexander Macdonald, of the Miners' National Association, Lloyd Jones, representing the Manchester Fustian Cutters, and Joseph Leicester, of the Flint Glass Makers' Society, together with George Potter (chairman) and George Howell (secretary).

The committee at once drew up and distributed to M.P.s a printed circular asking for rejection of the criminal provisions of the Trades Union Bill. Their prompt action 'gave dissatisfaction to some members of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades,' with whom they had been instructed to co-operate, but agreement was eventually reached between the two bodies,' the Conference of Amalgamated Trades instructing its committee and officers 'to act with the Congress committee and to take such steps as might seem necessary to improve the Government Bill as far as possible.'" The utmost concession that

<sup>1</sup> Minutes, Aug. 3, 1870.

<sup>2</sup> Circular dated Aug. 11, 1870. *Beehive*, Aug. 13, 1870.

<sup>3</sup> Circular dated Oct. 2, 1870. *Beehive*, Oct. 22, 1870.

<sup>4</sup> *Beehive*, Feb. and March, 1870. Webb, S. and B., *op. cit.*, pp. 276-80.

<sup>1</sup> Undated circular, probably issued at the end of Feb. 1871. *Beehive*, March 4, 1871.  
<sup>2</sup> The MS. Minute Book of the Congress is in the George Howell Collection (Bishopsgate Institute), Howell being its secretary. Detailed reports appeared in the *Beehive* and there were accounts in many other newspapers.  
<sup>3</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Committee to the Fourth T.U.C., at Nottingham, Jan. 8, 1872.  
<sup>4</sup> Minutes, March 24, 1871.



could be obtained, however, was division of the Bill into two, the 'Trades Union Bill' and the 'Criminal Law Amendment Bill,' the latter containing the criminal clauses to which trade unionists objected so strongly. All the efforts of the joint committee failed to prevent the Criminal Law Amendment Act from being passed, but trade unions did at least, by the other Act, secure full legal recognition and protection for their funds.

Immediately after the passing of this legislation, the Conference of Amalgamated Trades dissolved itself, considering that it had 'discharged the duties for which it was organised.' As the Webbs point out, 'The Secretaries of the Amalgamated Societies, especially Allan and Applegarth, had, indeed, attained the object which they personally had most at heart.... The wider issue which remained to be fought required a more representative organisation.' This was provided by the Trades Union Congress, now established as a national 'Labour Parliament,' meeting annually, with a permanent Parliamentary Committee to provide representative leadership for the whole trade union movement. Under its leadership was waged the vigorous agitation which finally resulted in <sup>1875</sup> in the repeal of the obnoxious Criminal Law Amendment Act.<sup>3</sup> Trade unions, to use George Howell's words, were now 'liberated from the last vestige of the criminal laws specially appertaining to labour.' This resounding triumph was the first in the long list of achievements of the Trades Union Congress down to the present day.

<sup>1</sup> Minutes, Sept. 1, 1871.  
<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 282-83.  
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 283-92.