LABOUR AND UNEMPLOYMENT 1900-1914

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Kent at Canterbury, September 1969, by Kenneth D. Brown.

I declare that this thesis is wholly my own work, and embodies the results of research carried out under the supervision of Professor F.S.L.Lyons between October 1966 and September 1969, during which time I was the holder of a University of Kent at Canterbury Research Studentship.

"We give thanks to thee, O God;
We give thanks." Psalm 51.

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K. D. Brown.

Abbreviations used in the text.

Political Parties

B.S.P.	British Socialist Party
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party
I.L.P.M.D.C.	Independent Labour Party Metropolitan District Council
I.L.P.N.A.C.	Independent Labour Party National Administrative Council
L.R.C.	Labour Representation Committee
N.L.F.	National Liberal Federation
N.U.C.A.	National Union of Conservative Associations
S.D.F.	Social Democratic Federation
S.D.P.	Social Democratic Party
S.L.P.	Socialist Labour Party
S.P.G.B.	Socialist Party of Great Britain

Trade Union Organisations

A.I.S.	Associated Ironmoulders of Scotland
A.S.C.J.	Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners
A.S.E.	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
A.S.O.C.S.	Amalgamated Society of Operative Cotton Spinners
A.S.R.S.	Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
A.S.S.	Associated Shipwrights Society
A.S.S.A.	Amalgamated Shipconstructive and Shipwrights Association
A.T.S.	Amalgamated Toolmakers Society
D.W.R. & G.W.U.	Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers Union
E.T.U.	Electrical Trades Union
F.S.I.	Friendly Society of Ironfounders
G.F.T.U.	General Federation of Trade Unions
G.F.T.U.M.C.	General Federation of Trade Unions Management Committee
G.U.O.C.J.	General Union of Operative Carpenters and Joiners
L.S.C.	London Society of Compositors
L.T.C.	London Trades Council
M.F.G.B.	Miners Federation of Great Britain
M.U.O.B.	Manchester Unity Operative Bricklayers
N.A.F.T.A.	National Amalgamated Furniture Trades Association
N.A.U.L.	National Amalgamated Union of Labour
N.S.A.B.	National Society of Amalgamated Brassworkers
N.U.B.S.O.	National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives
N.U.C.J.	National Union of Carpenters and Joiners
N.U.D.L.	National Union of Dock Labourers
N.U.E.F.M.E.W.	National Union of Enginemen, Firemen, Mechanics, and Electrical Workers

N.U.G.W. & G.L.	National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers
O.B.S.	Operative Bricklayers Society
S.E.M.S.	Steam Enginemakers Society
S.L.P.	Society of Lithographic Printers
T.U.C.	Trades Union Congress
T.U.C.P.C.	Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee
T.U.T.R.A.	Trade Union Tariff Reform Association
U.S.B.	United Society of Boilermakers
U.S.B.I.S.S.	United Society of Boilermakers, Iron and Steel Shipbuilders

Miscellaneous

C.O.S.	Charity Organisation Society
L.C.C.	London County Council
L.C.W.C.	London Central Workers Committee
L.P.D.	Liberal Publication Department
N.F.L.A.	National Free Labour Association
N.U.C.	National Unemployed Committee
T.R.L.	Tariff Reform League

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Summary

This thesis is concerned with the ideas and actions of organised working men with respect to unemployment in the period 1900-1914, and it examines several themes. The first of these is the way in which unemployment agitation was organised by the working class groups and the problem involved - lack of money, mutual suspicions, apathy, government restrictions, and administrative difficulties.

Unlike the labour alliance after 1906, the S.D.F. had no way of expressing its views in parliament and was thus compelled to rely on street agitation to draw attention to the unemployed. In spite of the early hostility between the Social Democrats and the labour alliance there was considerable co-operation in this, especially at local level, notably in the struggle for the "right to work" after 1905. In 1908 the S.D.F. and a small group of socialist M.P.'s who had persistently shown themselves more energetic than the rest of the Labour Party in trying to secure government action for the unemployed, agreed to work together. This co-operation was short-lived, however, for it provoked hostility from several labour leaders, and in any case, the continuous S.D.F. criticism of the Labour Party left the parliamentary socialists with little alternative but to close their ranks. The political complexities of the next two years then threw this parliamentary group into dis-array but when elections, death, and political exigency had all taken their toll, a small remnant re-emerged to oppose the National Insurance Bill.

Some of the hostility to this co-operation apparently came from trade unionists who provided the bulk of Labour Party support and thus a third theme of this thesis is trade union attitudes to unemployment, noting particularly the reluctance to agitate except when distress was really bad, the desire often to seek solutions within the union framework, and the readiness of many of the leaders to work with the government in pushing through its legislative programme on unemployment at the expense of labour's own remedy, the Right to Work Bill.

The emergence of the idea of the "right to work" to overshadow the numerous other unemployment solutions discussed in the Introduction, the drafting of the Right to Work Bill, and the campaigns to get it through parliament, form another major thread in the story. The disruptive influence on the bill's support of the government programme, the minority report of the poor law commission, and the re-examination of its underlying economic assumptions, are also traced. Other remedies with which sections of the working class flirted, notably the eight hour day and tariff reform, are also discussed.

The impact of the unemployment question on internal relations within the labour movement is also noted. The criticism produced after 1907 by the Labour Party's ineffectiveness was due in part to its policy on unemployment and has been amply discussed elsewhere. This thesis shows, however, that as early as 1903-1904 I.L.P. leaders were being criticised for working with radicals in the National Unemployed Committe, and for concentrating on tariff reform, allegedly neglecting the unemployed.

Introduction. The Background of Thought.

Sobered by the horrors of the world war men could perhaps be forgiven for looking back with longing eyes at what seemed in retrospect to have been a golden pre-war era; one which, moreover, appeared to have vanished for ever. Although for many the passing of the Edwardian age was a matter for regret, time tended to obliterate the more unpleasant aspects of that period, while the advent of the dole and indeed, the war itself, served to slur memories of scenes such as those described by Jack London and W.S.Adams, which had been all too familiar.

> 'At a market tottery old men and women were searching in the garbage thrown in the mud for rotten potatoes, beans and vegetables, while little children clustered like flies around a festering mass of fruit, thrusting their arms to the shoulders into the liquid corruption, and drawing forth morsels but partially decayed, which they devoured on the spot.' [1]

> 'There was a pinched woman with a baby clutched in one hand and in the other sprigs of heather offered for sale. . . . There were the "runners", the unemployed, who would stumble alongside

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1 J.London, The people of the abyss (London; new ed., 1963), p 13.

> the vehicle, fighting off other "runners" in the hope of a few coppers for carrying the luggage. Why, he used to wonder, were their faces so grey, why on one occasion, had one stumbled and collapsed in the gutter?' [1]

That such episodes occurred was perhaps strange at a time when in terms of trade balances and national income Britain was exceedingly prosperous. But the national wealth, great as it was, was unevenly distributed among the population and only the upper and middle classes derived any benefit from competitive trade and its resultant prosperity. Between 1896-1914 real wages fell substantially while retail food prices rose by some 25% and it was thus not surprising that in 1906 Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman could claim that 12,000,000 people were living in, or very near, poverty.[2]

Fundamental to the whole problem of poverty was unemployment, as W.H.Beveridge neatly stated in 1909.

> 'A great body of workmen today are living on a quicksand, which at any moment may engulf individuals, which at certain intervals sinks for months or years below the sea surface altogether.'[3]

Bedevilling any attempt to cope with this problem was the fact that

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1 W.S.Adams, Edwardian portraits (London, 1957), p 5.

2 C.Petrie, Scenes of Edwardian England (London, 1956), p 234.

3 W.H.Beveridge, Unemployment a problem of industry (London, 1909), p 148.

until the advent of a national system of labour exchanges in 1909 it was not possible to estimate its extent. Until 1909 the only statistical information available was that contained in the monthly Board of Trade returns, which were compiled from figures supplied by certain leading trade unions. These unions, however, represented only some 650,000 members, less than a third of the total number of trade unionists, which itself was quite a small part of the labour force. Nor did the returns represent very accurately the number of unemployed in a particular union, especially in long periods of trade depression, for once a man had exhausted his unemployment benefit he had little incentive to keep his name on the union's unemployed register. Furthermore, the trades making the returns were not a fair cross section of all occupations as many of the more stable, such as mining, the railways, and the municipal services, were ignored. It should also be noted that the greater the fluctuation in the particular trade the greater the need for the union to pay unemployment donation - the very criterion for being included in the returns. Beveridge concluded, contrary to popular union opinion, that "the trade union returns show a much higher percentage of unemployment than would be found in the country generally."[1] But the figures did exclude the casual occupations, and seasonal trades such

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1 Beveridge, Unemployment, p 21.

as building were inadequately represented, two factors which redressed the balance somewhat.

The other sources of information consisted of the statistics gathered by the Board of Trade of the number of days worked in certain industries, and the returns made by some employers in the building and textile trades as to the number of workers to whom wages had been paid in the last week of the month. Pauper statistics also gave some idea of the ebb and flow of unemployment, but were of little use in estimating the number of current unemployed at a particular time as they rose and fell in the same pattern but at a later date, Beveridge estimating that the time lag was about one year.[1] The statistical information was so unreliable that the most accurate figure the poor law commissioners could give concerning the number of under employed people was between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000.[2]

The unfortunate workman who found himself with no work could usually survive for a time by drawing on his savings or, if he was a member of a union which paid unemployment money, by drawing this benefit. But if he failed to find work before these resources were exhausted he joined the great number who, sooner or later, were forced onto public relief. The main source of this was, of course, the poor

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1 Beveridge, Unemployment, p 48.

2 National Committee to promote the break up of the Poor Law, The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission. Part II. Unemployment (London, 1909), p 191.

law. Reconstructed in 1834 it was designed to cope with all categories of distress including the unemployed, and was based on a deterrent principle. The unemployed worker was to be maintained on a level below that of an independent labourer of the lowest class. But as the economic status of the latter was generally little better than that of the unemployed, the out of work applicant for relief was penalised by the stigma of pauperism - disfranchisement - and also by being required to perform arduous labour tasks in the workhouse. If the applicant was completely destitute his whole family entered the workhouse and was thus broken up. A modified workhouse test order, first used by the Whitechapel Guardians in conjunction with the Charity Organisation Society, provided relief to the family of an able bodied unemployed man if he himself agreed to go into the workhouse. Working men, however, were generally loath to resort to either of these forms of relief if they could possibly be avoided, as they exposed them to the humiliation of accepting relief and took away the chance of finding work by keeping them occupied in the workhouse.

The potential threat to the family combined with the generally harsh administration of the poor law served to make the workhouse a place of dread to all who lived in its shadow, as the following illustrates:

> '"If you go for the poor law man I'll commit suicide". This was the declaration of a poor out of work clothes finisher, a woman, slowly starving to death in a miserable room in the East End of London . . . that has been the object of the administrators of the poor law for many years, to make the workhouse a place of punishment, a place hated and detested, so that the poor would prefer anything to becoming inmates of such a hell, and then offering that to the destitute as the only alternative to starvation.' [1]

In times of excessive distress the Outdoor Relief Regulation of 1852 was frequently utilised to permit the opening of labour yards, which allowed the unemployed the doubtful privilege of picking oakum or breaking stone in return for a small wage. It was not a very economic measure, stone at St. Olaves (Southwark) costing £7 per ton to break in a year when its market price was only 12/- per ton.[2] This method of relieving the unemployed also tended to attract low grade labour and the standard of work was generally set by the most unwilling men. Sometimes, in the case of a sudden emergency, outdoor relief was given without a labour test.

Finally under the poor law, there was the casual ward at which the man in search of work could obtain board and lodging in return for

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1 Justice, 13 December, 1902.

2 Beveridge, Unemployment, p 151, n 2.

the performance of work, and detention in the ward for an additional night. Persistent application for entry was penalised by four nights of further detention. Although casual wards provided for men irrespective of their place of residence (unlike other forms of poor law relief) they were seldom patronised by genuine working men, for to stay in the ward made it virtually impossible to look for work. Jack London, who as part of his experiment to penetrate the life of London's east end workers, spent a few nights in a casual ward, had a very low opinion of it, characterising it as a place "where the homeless, bedless, penniless man, if he be lucky (the queue for admission started long before opening time) may casually rest his weary bones, and then work like a navvy next day to pay for it." [1]

The various methods of relief available under the poor law were all unpopular with working men, partly for the specific reasons noted above, and partly because of the implication behind the 1834 principle that unemployment and other social misfortunes were in some way due to personal failure on the part of the individual concerned. The rigid application of the poor law regulations meant in practice that the unemployed were only helped after they had been pauperised. Finally, it should be noted that no attempt had been made, nor did the

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1 London, People of the abyss, p 33. All of London's experiments were carried out in London's east end, but things were apparently no better in the north of England. See M.Higgs, Glimpses into the abyss (London, 1904), pp 136-74.

facilities exist, to distinguish practically between the unemployed and the other poor law cases. They were all treated in the same way and through the same channels.

It was left to Joseph Chamberlain to try and make this distinction, thus facilitating a fundamental attack on unemployment itself. In a circular which he issued while President of the Local Government Board in 1886, Chamberlain introduced the idea of municipal work at wages for those who were temporarily unemployed, the work to be capable of performance by all. It was not to involve the stigma of pauperism, neither was it to compete with the labour of those still in work nor interfere with the resumption by its recipients of normal work, once it became available. The men were to be chosen on the recommendation of the local guardians and, in order to prevent imposture, the wages were to be less than those normally paid for similar work.

From 1886 these municipal relief works became an almost annual institution in cities such as Newcastle, although in others they were still started only in times of exceptional distress. In the course of time, however, local authorities found it increasingly difficult to adhere to the terms of the circular which was re-issued in 1887, 1891, 1892, 1893, and, in a modified form, in 1895. The wages proviso was gradually dropped because it led to discontent on the part of men

temporarily employed against regular employees who received more money for the same work, and also because trade unionists objected to having their wage rates undercut. In most cases anyway, the only job capable of being done by all was navvying for which the basic wage was so low that it would have been impossible to reduce it. This process was aided by the ambiguous report of the Select Committee on Unemployment which stated in 1896 that there was "no sufficient reason why a person employed upon Relief Works should not receive the rate of wages current in the district, if he is able to earn the same."[1]

The second condition which Chamberlain had originally imposed - that the guardians should recommend men who in view of past records and present circumstances it was undesirable to send to the workhouse - also gradually disappeared. The respectability of a man's past was of no concern to a borough surveyor seeking men who could perform a particular task efficiently and well. Nor were the means of carrying out the necessary investigations into a man's past generally available. What happened in practice was that a municipal employment register was opened, using a minimum residence qualification to guard against vagrants. From this list men were drawn as required, sometimes in rotation, sometimes according to the number of their dependents.

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1 Quoted in National Committee to promote the break up of the Poor Law, Minority Report, p 120.

Certain failings soon made themselves apparent in this system of relief works, however. It became clear that the taking on of extra men in the winter months when work was scarce undermined the position of regular council employees and produced no small degree of tension. Nor did the work do anything to improve the men industrially or morally, especially as many authorities, having exhausted the more attractive tasks, such as park laying, had to resort to less useful, and therefore more degrading occupations such as stone breaking. The provision of municipal relief works tended also to enlarge the class of chronically under-employed, men who were supported for a few days but not set on their feet, and whose desire to seek regular work was possibly dampened by the knowledge that if they failed to find work for themselves they could always fall back on the local authority. Unemployed men were tempted to stay in areas where such works were provided but where there was no ordinary demand for their labour. This reduced the mobility of labour, lack of which was one factor responsible for producing areas of heavy unemployment. Finally, the works were grossly uneconomic, even when they were really necessary, which was often not the case. Even road mending demanded skills not possessed by many men. Authorities were often forced to such expedients as that adopted by the Paddington Borough Council in 1904 when the borough surveyor was instructed to remove the scarifer

from the council steam roller and to employ extra men to do any necessary road picking, a move which was condemned by Charles Masterman, the future Liberal M.P., as the "climax of absurdity." [1]

In spite of these failings municipal relief works were far more popular with working men than were any of the poor law institutions, although their form and condition were frequently the cause of discontent. What was really required, it was often argued, was work that was necessary and remunerative and also paid at reasonable rates. Above all it was necessary that the state should finance national work schemes to help out the local authorities. These ideas were common in working class circles in the last few years of the nineteenth century although the National Free Labour Association, as was common, found itself opposed to the mainstream of labour thought. The editor of the Free Labour Gazette condemned as a "constellation of economic brilliancies" suggestions which James Keir Hardie made on these lines in 1895. How, asked the editor, could it be practicable to provide remunerative work when the very reason for men being unemployed was that employers could not find enough work for them already ? Where, he added, was the remuneration to come from? [2]

Relief works of the type provided by the Chamberlain circular, while giving concrete expression to the shift in public thinking

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1 C.F.G.Masterman, "The problem of the unemployed", Independent Review, IV (January 1905), p 561.

2 Free Labour Gazette, February 1895.

towards the view that state intervention was necessary to tackle problems of poverty and unemployment, which took place over the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, were regarded with a somewhat jaundiced eye by the main charitable agency responsible for much of the effort made to relieve the unemployed, the C.O.S. Disliking too, the tendency to relax the rigid principles of the 1834 poor law the C.O.S. refused to respond to the changing public mood and continued to cling to the view that unemployment and poverty were both the result of personal failing, rather than the product of external economic circumstances. Helen Bosanquet claimed in 1898 that "in charitable work we devote ourselves to those who are weak, who have in some way failed . . . ."[1] Indiscriminate charity, of which there was a great deal, public aid, whether in the form of relief works or poor law unions giving aid without a labour test, both were condemned by the C.O.S. on the ground that often the individuals concerned did not deserve help, or else because it was feared that people would be encouraged to rely on others to bring them through their difficulties. The remedy for most social maladies was thought to lie in the moral correction of the individual.

It was true, of course, that some people were just unemployable due to some personal weakness, either moral or physical.[2] But while

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1 H.Bosanquet, The administration of charitable relief (London, 1898), p 3.

2 Not all who were classified as unemployable were in fact lost cases. George Lansbury made a point of employing such people in his east end timber business, and in time many justified his confidence in them. See R.Postgate, The life of George Lansbury (London, 1951), p 45.

many appreciated this fact, the means of distinguishing between this category and the far more numerous victims of new machinery or trade fluctuation did not exist in practice, which may explain why the C.O.S. doctrine had such support. The chief moral failure which the C.O.S. alleged to be a cause of unemployment was lack of thrift. Even after the bad winter of 1879 some council members "thought that even such exceptional distress should be left to teach its lesson of providence to those who suffered by it".[1] Charles Loch, secretary of the C.O.S. for many years, claimed in 1887 that "out of work cases are frequently want of thrift cases".[2] It apparently escaped the notice of the advocates of thrift that those worst affected by unemployment were usually in no position to be thrifty. Those not in unions generally had no resources on which to fall back. General labourers were prone to unemployment but the general labour unions did not pay unemployment money. Even this source of relief would have been denied to its beneficiaries had the ideas of H.Sharpe been widely held, as they were by members and supporters of the N.F.L.A. In 1907 Sharpe wrote a pamphlet in which he set out to prove that if unions were banned the price of manufactured goods would fall, demand would thus increase, and more men would therefore be employed.[3]

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1 H.Bosanquet, Social work in London, 1869-1912 (London, 1914), p 315.

2 C.O.S., 19th Annual Report, 1886-7, p 33.

3 H.Sharpe, The unemployed: cause and cure (London, 1907).

Another moral failing was alleged to be drunkeness, and this was a view which lingered for some years into the new century. Nor were C.O.S. members its only supporters. In 1907 one who claimed to be a workman wrote that "by far the most potent causes which affect the continuity and volume of employment . . . are the wastage of health and wealth on intemperance of all kinds."[1] Even the radical, Percy Alden, stated that no-one with experience of the unemployed would deny that many jobs were lost through drinking or gambling.[2]

The essence of the solutions favoured by the C.O.S. and its adherents was self help. A man could be tided over a period of distress if he deserved it, but he must be taught to remain self reliant. Special aid was only to be given in times of exceptional distress, and then only after the most careful investigation into the individual's personal circumstances. It was probably this above all which served to make organised charity so unpopular with working men and Helen Bosanquet warned prospective C.O.S. workers that men would often "be found very much averse to charity".[3] The underlying philosophy that unemployment was a personal failure and therefore inevitable made many very bitter. Hardie wrote in 1895 that "many a comfortable, well to do citizen salves his conscience with the pretence

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1 J.G.Hutchinson, "A workman's view of the remedy for unemployment", Nineteenth Century, LXIV (August 1907), p 338.

2 P.Alden, The unemployed (London, 1905), p 36.

3 Bosanquet, Charitable relief, p 21.

that all this is inevitable."[1] The other decisive influence in causing the unpopularity of the C.O.S. in working class circles was its constant advocacy of emigration as a solution. In 1886, for example, a committee of the society was formed to assist deserving people to emigrate, after their personal circumstances had been rigorously investigated by district committees. In 1893 this committee helped 337 persons to go abroad.[2]

Emigration was also a favourite remedy of the other main organisations which catered for the unemployed, the Salvation Army and the Church Army. In his pamphlet Darkest England and the way out (London, 1890) General Booth of the Salvation Army proposed a system of immediate relief in city colonies, whence men would be sent to farm colonies for special training, and eventually to overseas colonies for permanent settlement.[3] Some idea of the extent of the emigration organised by the Salvation Army can be gained from the fact that in 1905 there were 4,174 officers working full time in the army's emigration office, aided by a further 24,243 volunteers.[4] Labour attitudes to emigration were aptly summed up in a resolution passed at the 1886 meeting of the Trades Union Congress when a Mr.Carling,

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1 Labour Leader, 2 November, 1895.

2 C.L.Mowatt, The Charity Organisation Society (London, 1961), p 90.

3 For an account of this pamphlet and its effects see H.Ausubel, "General Booth's scheme of social salvation", American Historical Review, LVI (April 1951), pp 519-25.

4 W.Booth, The recurring problem of the unemployed (London, 1905), p 29.

undoubtedly speaking for the majority, "expressed a strong antipathy against the working classes of this country, especially trade unionists, uttering one sentence in support of a system which would expatriate the people from the land that gave them birth."[1] H.M.Hyndman, chairman of the Social Democratic Federation, claimed that while few solutions were as superficially attractive as emigration, it was in fact based on the false assumption that over-population was a chief cause of unemployment.[2]

Although the charitable work of the church armies was perhaps less unpopular in working class circles than the poor law and most forms of private charity, possibly because to some extent they had rejected the standard C.O.S. doctrines, they did suffer from the anti-clerical outlook of some English socialists, particularly those in the secularist S.D.F. Most vituperative of all were the comments of the extremer wings of the socialist movement. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, an off-shoot of the S.D.F., felt that the Salvation Army "provided the bourgeoisie with a cheap and effective form of sticking plaster wherewith to cover up the hideous ulcer which is eating out the vitals of our class."[3] Jack London had little love for the army either after he had spent a night at a salvationist

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1886, p 23.

2 H.M.Hyndman, The emigration fraud exposed (London, n.d.), pp 1-9.

3 Socialist Standard, 1 March, 1910.

hostel.

> 'Numbers of men had been waiting since five o'clock for it (breakfast which arrived at eleven o'clock) while all of us had waited at least four hours; and in addition, we had been herded like swine, packed like sardines and treated like curs, and preached at and sung to, and prayed for . . . .' [1]

However much good charity may have done in the short term it cannot be denied that in the long run it had certain harmful effects. For one thing it did nothing to solve the unemployment problem because it assumed that its occurence was inevitable. It could only offer palliatives to its sufferers. Its activities encouraged governments to ignore unemployment until it was so serious as to be beyond the scope of private agencies, while the spasmodic and local nature of much charitable effort militated against labour mobility. As one contemporary remarked; "Today's charity is indeed a credit to the heart but a disgrace to the head."[2] Worst of all, the dispensations of charitable relief tended to degrade the people it was meant to help, particularly with its inquiries into private lives.

It did not escape the notice of many contemporaries that existing methods of tackling unemployment were unsatisfactory and, as already mentioned, the last twenty years of the nineteenth century saw a swing

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1 London, People of the abyss, pp 57-8. For a complete contrast, however, see Higgs, Glimpses into the abyss, pp 175-76.

2 L.Bradshaw, How to avoid the red peril of the unemployed (London, 1907), p 7.

in public opinion towards the idea that state intervention was necessary if poverty was to be effectively overcome in England. Again as already mentioned the old attitudes did not disappear overnight, and the early years of the new century present a curious interweaving of theories and ideas. In part the stimulus to new thinking was provided by increasing foreign commercial competition which led to a diminution of the material well-being and wealth which had seemed to justify individualism in Britain. Another cause of the change was that after 1884 working men had the vote, and by the Local Government Act of the same year the local government franchise was extended and property qualifications for poor law guardians were abolished, all of which meant that the voice of the working classes was heard increasingly in the counsels of government. Perhaps too, there was a fear of socialism, heightened no doubt when in 1886 and 1887 London's west end was the scene of violent clashes between the police and the unemployed who had been organised by the S.D.F. Probably the most potent factor in promoting a reconsideration of the traditional ideas about poverty, however, was the great increase in knowledge about working class life which came as a result of the social investigations made by men such as Charles Booth and B.S.Rowntree. Both these investigators showed by careful and detailed

analysis how false was the accepted picture of a small number of people living in poverty caused by their own shortcomings.[1]

The increased public concern with the problems of poverty and unemployment can be seen in many ways: in the scores of pamphlets and books written on the subject; in the numerous government inquiries into its various aspects; in the great rush of private charity, a sentiment which, according to one observer amounted "almost to human instinct."[2] Perhaps above all it was symbolised in the foundation in 1883 of Toynbee Hall, where young professional men lived in London's east end, worked generally in the west end or the city, and devoted their spare time to cultural and social activities among the east enders.

Working men naturally, were not unaware of the changing social climate and they joined eagerly in the discussions, particularly as they were generally very critical of existing agencies of relief. The philosphical basis of the various socialist organisations, which began to make headway among the workers in these same years, was different - Hyndman's view was Marxist, Hardie's based on his every-day experience of capitalism - but this did not prevent them from sharing ideas as to practical solutions and palliatives for unemployment. Similarly, the clash between old and new unionism, while it symbolised to some extent the conflict between acceptance of

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1 C.Booth, Life and labour in London (London: Six Vols., 1892-97). B.S.Rowntree, Poverty: a study of town life (London, 1901).

2 F.Ponsonby, Recollections of three reigns (London, 1951), p 300.

the traditional capitalist system and the struggle for the co-operative commonwealth, did not prevent the two sides from sharing in some measure opinions on unemployment.[1] Many ideas were discussed in working class circles and while some never gained much support, it is possible to see a hard core of thought on the subject.

One idea which was adopted enthusiastically by conservative working men, and also by some traditionally associated with the opposite end of the political spectrum, was the restriction of alien immigration on the grounds that English workmen were being deprived of jobs by foreigners. In October 1893, William Collison, organiser of the N.F.L.A., told the Lord Mayor of London that a leading cause of unemployment was "the steady and unrestricted influx of foreign workers which has displaced home labour."[2] The Tory victory in the general election of 1895 fostered the hope among N.F.L.A. members that the government would resolutely tackle the problem of "the undesirable competitors . . . entering Britain in ever increasing numbers."[3]

Some trade unionists shared these sentiments, although there was no unanimity on the matter. A resolution instructing the parliamentary committee of the T.U.C. to frame a bill on the lines of the recent report of the Commission on Emigration was passed at the

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1 See T.Mann & B.Tillett, The new trades unionism (London, 1890).

2 Free Labour Gazette, March 1893.

3 Ibid., August 1895.

annual congress of 1889, but only against the opposition of Hardie, William Mosses, and Alan Gee, all leading figures in the labour movement. An anti-alien resolution was also passed in 1894, when one delegate claimed that "although these people had no doubt a right to come to England if there were work for them to do", there was not sufficient work for British workers and therefore "they should not be allowed to enter the country."[1] Although anti-alien grumbles had long been heard, especially from London workers in the furniture, tailoring, and wool trades, it was not held very widely among organised workers to be a leading cause of unemployment. Trade unionists and socialists were mainly concerned about the use of foreign workers as strike breakers.

Closely connected with the alien question and its implication of foreign competition was the idea that unemployment was due to free trade and that the erection of protective tariff barriers against foreign imports would increase domestic employment. In the 1895 election several Conservative candidates promised some vague scheme of protection for suffering industries, and in some quarters there was a determined agitation for the establishment of an imperial zollverein. This was strongly supported by the N.F.L.A. which had already passed

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1894, p 59.

resolutions against free trade. Summing up the fiscal debate at the association's 1893 conference one delegate said of the unemployed:

> 'Their cry is for work, for the means of earning bread, and yet the hide bound traditions of exploded and one-sided free trade, acting in conjunction with the let-me-alone tactics of the whigs we dignify as our modern old men of the sea, prevent both work and bread being obtainable.'[1]

A similar resolution was passed again at the 1896 conference.

But the free labourers appear to have been the only organised workers' movement which favoured, as a body, the demand for protection. The chairman of the 1887 T.U.C. firmly rejected the suggestion that a change in the country's fiscal system would improve social conditions on the grounds that things were just as bad in protected countries.[2] In the years before Chamberlain launched his reform campaign in 1903 the nearest the T.U.C. came to favouring a protectionist policy was in 1894 when a resolution was passed complaining that British industry was adversely affected by the government giving the contract for naval pork to foreign contractors.[3] For socialists protection and free trade were equally bad, although in practice, the former came in for heavier attack. In February 1886 30,000 people attended a demonstration organised by the S.D.F. to

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1 N.F.L.A., Annual Report, 1893, pp 29-30.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1887, p 11.

3 Ibid., 1894, p 45.

counter a Fair Trade League meeting convened to demand protection for British goods.[1]

Most shades of labour opinion agreed that the introduction of labour saving machinery and its corollary, cheap labour, were leading causes of unemployment. Oddly, however, the attempts made in the 1880's and the 1890's to restrict child labour were seldom framed with reference to unemployment. For example, a resolution discussed at the 1895 conference of the Independent Labour Party appealed not to the increase in employment which would result from the prohibition of child labour, but simply to "social decency and industrial justice."[2] This was also the gist of resolutions passed between 1895-1897 at the T.U.C. conferences, although textile workers always opposed them as they benefitted from cheap labour.

Many felt that the answer to this aspect of unemployment lay simply in a reduction of hours, often combining the demand with a request for a minimum wage. The demand for a statutory eight hour day was made initially by the S.D.F. as early as 1883. London building trade workers took it up after the publication of Tom Mann's pamphlet What a compulsory eight hour day means to the workers (London, 1886). Throughout the late eighties and the nineties there were constant clashes at trade union congresses between the supporters of the eight

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1 F.Gould, Hyndman, prophet of socialism (London, 1928), p 104.

2 I.L.P., Annual Report, 1895, p 9.

hour day and those who felt that a reduction of hours would mean smaller wages and a gradual loss of work to foreigners. Although Hardie raised the question in parliament in 1894, and a bill was introduced the following year, nothing had been achieved by the turn of the century. This was due partly to the weak parliamentary position of labour, and partly to the setback the movement received when the Amalgamated Society of Engineers was defeated after a long and costly strike for an eight hour day in 1897. Trade unionists in any case, were divided over both aims and means. Some wanted a general eight hour day, while others wanted reductions in certain industries as a first step. They were divided also over whether the change was to be secured by legislative action or by organised effort, a division made manifest when a plebiscite was organised in 1888.[1] Predictably, the eight hour movement did not include among its supporters the N.F.L.A., a leader in the Free Labour Gazette asking, "how can labour be independent when it consents to be thus bound and shackled by Government . . . let every man, and every body of men, fix their own working hours."[2]

For others the way to tackle unemployment lay in greater working class organisation. The old unionism saw organisation as necessary in order to provide security within the union framework, and this attitude was well illustrated by the presidential remarks at the 1879

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1 See G.Howell, Trade unionism old and new (London, 1891), pp 170-205.

2 Free Labour Gazette, February 1895.

congress.

> 'Never in the experience of your committee has there been such widespread suffering and misery amongst the working people as there is at the present time. . . . This has severely taxed the resources of the unions; but, with rare exceptions, extraordinary claims have been promptly met, and thousands of homes have been blessed through the frugality of those thoughtful workmen . . . while the much commended non-unionist has had to seek charitable relief.' [1]

On the other hand, the new unionism of Mann, Tillett, and Thorne, saw trade union organisation as a means of pressurising government and employers into conceding social and economic improvements. This new spirit was well illustrated too, in the move towards independent working class representation in parliament. "May I be permitted to impress on the workers", said the president of the T.U.C. in 1897,"the fact that the future of labour is within their hands, and will depend on them alone."[2]

But although all saw the importance of organisation as a means of combatting unemployment there were many obstacles to overcome. There was the early resistance of the older union leaders to the idea of independent labour representation. In addition, the unemployed themselves seem to have displayed remarkable apathy in their suffering, as

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1879, p 10.

2 Ibid., 1897, p 28.

Masterman noted.

> 'There was a time when things were less rosy; when we stood in knots at street corners . . . when work was solicited and solicited in vain . . . . But that time seems long ago . . . . We have no faith in its recurrence . . .we possess a genial faith in a Deity who is nothing if not amiable, and we are convinced that tomorrow will see the dawn of the golden age.' [1]

Sometimes this apathy was active hostility. "Labour leaders can testify", wrote Will Thorne, "that . . . their hardest kicks and greatest abuse come from those they are trying to help and serve."[2]

Another obstacle was that some men even thought that the very existence of unions was a basic cause of unemployment as they promoted strikes which disrupted industry, and fixed high artificial wage levels. The pamphlet written by H.Sharpe has already been mentioned, but the N.F.L.A. was also an adherent of this view.

> '"Here, Bill, I'll smash your blooming skull if you take that job on", says Tom, the Trade Unionist; and then our friend Tom solemnly calls the attention of Parliament to the grave question of the unemployed.' 3

A further group of suggestions which found considerable support as offering likely solutions for unemployment related to the land. Rural immigration into the towns undoubtedly increased competition for

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1 C.F.G.Masterman, From the abyss (London, 1901), p 14.

2 W.Thorne, My life's battles (London, 1925), p 37.

3 Free Labour Gazette, January 1906.

unskilled jobs, depressed wages, and probably accelerated the descent in the social scale of the old, the less able, and the disabled town workers. To keep agricultural workers in the country, it was argued, adequate facilities should be provided for them, notably housing and security of tenure. Suggestions of this nature were legion at labour conferences.[1] Others demanded that local authorities should be given powers of purchase, compulsory if necessary, over land needed for housing or colonies for training the unemployed.[2] One writer pointed out that if local authorities utilised fully all their powers over land and the unemployed which had accrued since the time of Elizabeth I, there would be no need for further legislation.[3]

Some thought that the unemployed should receive training in agriculture and horticulture at special labour colonies designed to fit them for future careers as small-holders. The leading labour advocate of these colonies was George Lansbury, the driving force behind the colony at Laindon set up under the auspices of the Poplar Guardians. He prefered, however, to give the credit for his work to Joseph Fels, the American industrial magnate, who put up the money for several such schemes.[4] Will Crooks was another who favoured the

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1 See J.B.Paton, The unemployable and the unemployed (London, 1905), p 24.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1897, p 54.

3 J.T.Dodd in the Labour Leader, August 1893.

4 Postgate, Life of George Lansbury, p 68.

letting of land to the unemployed, once they had been given an agricultural training. He told his biographer:

> 'I maintain that even the town wastrel takes more kindly to the land than to anything else. Of course, I know that before he can be made any use of he must be trained; but then it is well known that I favour farm colonies for training him.' [1]

A rural note was also dominant in the schemes of national works which, it was felt, the government should prepare and set under way when unemployment grew unusually high. Afforestation was perhaps the most popular but harbour construction, coast and fen reclamation also found a place. All of these were included in Tillett's motion at the 1895 T.U.C., while Hardie had added to them the previous year the suggestion that in times of distress the government should undertake work which would have to be done in any case at some time in the future, such as the construction of new war ships or roads.[2] He also suggested that the government should help local authorities to finance local plans on similar lines.[3] In 1894 a resolution was passed at the T.U.C. to the effect that a ballot should be held among members to see whether they were in favour of the government financing remunerative

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1 G.Haw, The life story of Will Crooks M.P. (London, 1917), pp 265-66.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1895, p 44. Hardie's suggestions were made in the house of commons and reported in the Labour Leader, 5 January, 1894.

3 Ibid., 19 January, 1896.

local works - naturally at union rates and conditions.[1]

If many Englishmen, workers and otherwise, could give tacit assent to many, if not all, of the ideas discussed above, there were not many in 1900 who would have agreed with Hardie, Hyndman, and Robert Blatchford, that the only real remedy for unemployment was the abolition of capitalism in favour of socialism. To socialists, cheap labour, the introduction of labour saving machinery and trade fluctuations, were not the basic causes of unemployment but merely symptoms of capitalist organisation. The programme presented by the I.L.P. to the International Socialist Congress in July 1896 commenced with the assertion that unemployment was the inevitable outcome of capitalism and would only disappear when capitalism itself was abolished.[2] In the same year the Labour Leader ran a competition on unemployment in the hope of finding new ideas on causes and solutions. In giving the results the competition organiser, Percy Wallis, said that the entries had been disappointing but they all pointed to the basic and "all important fact that the real cause for want of employment is profit making."[3] Only production for use, as opposed to production for profit, argued the socialists, would lead to the disappearance of unemployment, hence the frequent demands for the

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1894, p 64.

2 I.L.P., Annual Report, 1896, p 19.

3 Labour Leader, 14 November, 1895.

taking into public ownership of monopolies and basic economic resorces, such as the mines, railways, and canals.

The logical conclusion of this line of argument was that, as the state was responsible for maintaining the economic system which produced unemployment, it should also be responsible for maintaining the resulting unemployed. Thus at the I.L.P. conference in 1895 the Huddersfield Branch moved a resolution claiming that one of the citizen's inalienable rights should be the right to work and to enjoy the fruits of his own labour. A similar resolution from the Cardiff Branch stated that as a first step towards amelioration parliament should recognise its responsibility to find work for all who needed it. In bad times the government should make grants to all local authorities unable to provide work for the unemployed in their own area. Those who received any money from these projected grants were not to be disfranchised.[1]

Earlier in the same year H.Russell Smart, mover of the Huddersfield resolution at the conference, had written an article in the Labour Leader which, while based on an assumption unacceptable to most socialists led to the conclusion of the "right to work" which appeared in the conference resolutions, and which formed the basis of much pre-war labour agitation, a Right to Work Bill. Smart wrote that

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1 I.L.P., Annual Report, 1895, p 26.

socialist theories on unemployment were based on the fallacy that it was a necessary corollary of capitalism. He personally thought that capitalism would not be removed until unemployment was vanquished, a complete reversal of orthodox socialist doctrine. What was needed, he went on, was a minimum wage and shorter hours to reduce the amount of unemployment. For those who were still out of work who had lived for six months in one area the local authority should be compelled to find work (the nature of which he specified in clause three of his draft bill) for a forty hour week at a minimum wage of 24/- per week.[1]

These then were the main trends prevalent in working class thought on the problem of unemployment at the turn of the century. The demand for the restriction of hours, a minimum wage, protection, greater organisation, the institution of government and local authority works, land law reforms, even the "right to work", were, however, by no means confined to working class thought. Given the fluid state of public opinion at the turn of the century on the whole question of poverty, it is perhaps not surprising to find that Henry Hyndman, advocate of some of the more extreme measures, was born into the upper middle class, while one of his more spectacular converts was Lady Warwick. In many cases it is difficult to see any real difference between working class thought and that of advanced Liberals, such as Percy Alden and Charles Masterman. Even some

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1 Labour Leader, 14 February, 1895.

Conservatives were being forced to conclude that some degree of state intervention was necessary. The main difference between the groups was in the extent to which they were prepared to countenance such interference, and the dividing line tended to fall between the socialists on the one hand and everybody else, including the bulk of trade unionists, on the other.

This brief account is by no means exhaustive so far as working class ideas on unemployment are concerned, but it covers the main themes. Current methods of coping with the problem were based on the assumption that it was part and parcel of the existing order. Nothing could be done to prevent it, action could only be taken to relieve its sufferers - if they deserved it. In the changing climate of opinion at the end of the nineteenth century the working classes readily favoured ideas based on the different premise that the government could in some measure, prevent unemployment by regulating the amount of work available, and by retraining those whose skills had been superceded by machinery. Above all, they wanted a system which would enable the unemployed to work, rather than leaving them to depend on charity or the poor law. Longfellow's poem, "Challenge", provides a suitable preface to the story of agitation with which this thesis is concerned.

'There is a greater army
That besets us round with strife;
A starving numberless army
At all the gates of life.

The poverty stricken millions
Who challenge our wine and bread,
And impeach us all as traitors,
Both the living and the dead.

And whenever I sit at the banquet,
When the feast and song are high,
Amid the mirth and music
I can hear that fearful cry.'

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1 Quoted in London, People of the abyss, p 127.

Chapter 1. The Recurrence of the Problem.

> 'Finally, we have to report a temporary cessation of public interest in the unemployed problem. This is no doubt due to the open winter and boom in trade withdrawing from the sluggish public mind those harrowing pictures and dramatic demonstrations which have previously found an annual place in the press. . . these causes are temporary. The normal current of change forcing social conditions more and more under the attention of the democracy will by and by assert itself, and it behoves our comrades to see to it that they are ready for the turn of the tide.' [1]

The "tide" to which the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. thus referred in its annual report of 1897 first began to show signs of turning early in 1902 as the Boer War petered out to its unhappy end and the boom which it had stimulated began to flatten out.[2] In the first week of February the London Guardians provided relief for more people than at any time since 1873 in that particular week, an ominous sign which apparently went unnoticed in official circles.[3] The poor law officers, meeting in conference in March, showed no sign of interest in unemployment at all.

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1 I.L.P., Annual Report, 1897, p 14.

2 For the economic effects of the war see R.Sayers, A history of economic change in England (London, 1967), p 38.

3 The number was 110,666. See The Times, 22 February, 1902.

Significantly, the first newspaper to make editorial comment was Justice, and no doubt the S.D.F. leaders welcomed the opportunity to re-establish their former popularity as organisers of the unemployed, after the execration they had suffered for their opposition to the war . In reporting distress in almost every industrial centre the paper suggested that soon employers would be demanding wage reductions, and that the current anti-union campaign had been started with this ultimate object in view.[1] Local leaders, taking the hint thrown out by the editor, began to organise local agitation and in Northampton several of them were fined and bound over for leading an invasion of the town hall to protest against the council's decision to close down the local relief works. But within the S.D.F. there were already signs of the tensions which were to result in open split in 1903. The policy of trying to secure palliatives, which included the organising of the unemployed for short term ends, was increasingly attacked by the "impossibilist" wing of the party and provoked heated replies from Hyndman.

> 'The idea . . . seems to have grown up of late among genuine socialists in this country that all palliatives are useless . . . . Impossibilists are only Anarchists in socialist clothing. For can any sane man deny that the palliatives of the S.D.F. would help

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1 Justice, 22 February, 1902.

> our cause if carried out by political or other means? Surely well-fed children could show as men and women a bolder front to the common enemy than starvelings dragged up in physical decrepitude . . . ?[1]

It was not until August that the I.L.P. took much notice of the worsening employment situation, when the Labour Leader remarked that the various organisations charged with the task of finding work for discharged soldiers were encountering great difficulties.[2] But again it had been the Social Democrats who had first seen the potential danger of this large and sudden influx of workers, predicting that many of the troops would "come home to find their places filled and no work staring them in the face."[3] By the autumn press pessimism and the repeated pleas of the National Association for the Employment of Reserve and Discharged Soldiers led the Secretary of State for War and Field Marshall Roberts to make a joint press appeal to all employers to remember the soldiers when taking on new labour, and asking clothing buyers to place their orders with the war employment bureau. This appeal was fairly well received in the press although some papers maintained that it was the state's responsibility to fit the troops out to compete for work with civilians on equal

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1 Justice, 5 April, 1902. See also C.Tsuzuki, "The impossibilist revolt in Britain", International Review of Social History, I (1956), pp 377-97.

2 Labour Leader, 30 August, 1902.

3 Justice, 28 June, 1902.

terms when they left the army.[1] Public reaction was diverse. While many expressed approval of the appeal others, such as a "man in the street", claimed that it was shameful that this was all the country could do for its soldiers.[2] This was also the sentiment of labour. The Labour Leader wanted to know what right men such as Brodrick and Roberts had to "throw these men on the charity of the country" and demanded that they be kept on full pay until work was found for them.[3] The fears of the railway unions were more selfish, though none the less real. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants had suffered in the past from the strike breaking activities of the N.F.L.A. and was thus naturally alarmed when the Cardiff Branch of Collison's organisation claimed to have 300 ex-soldiers on its books, and when it was revealed that the Taff Vale Railway Company, with whom the union had clashed so bitterly, had already taken on between forty and fifty. It was unfair, argued the leader writer of the Railway Review, that the troops should be disgorged onto an over-stocked labour market, especially as those who had pensions could afford to take lower wages than ordinary workers.[4] None of the craft unions appear to have been much concerned at this stage and it would seem that most of the troops went to swell the ranks of the under-employed. Even the

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1 Daily Graphic, 14 November, 1902.

2 Morning Post, 14 November, 1902.

3 Labour Leader, 22 November, 1902.

4 Railway Review, 3 October, 1902.

general unions, who would have been most affected by this influx of labour, showed little sign of resentment. Pete Curran of the gas-workers and general labourers observed in September, for example, that they would simply have to "work and to wait in the hope of a brighter future."[1]

The socialist bodies became still more active, however, as the year wore on, and began to supplement their press agitation from the street corner, although as yet in a local and very spasmodic way. The Labour Leader welcomed the establishment of a labour bureau in London and urged all I.L.P. leaders to press for their establishment in every area. In Darlington the Spennymoor and Stockton Councils, both of which had closed down relief works, were the subject of bitter attacks from local I.L.P. branches. The agitation was given some semblance of cohesion when the I.L.P. secretary, John Penny, circularised all trades councils with copies of the unemployment resolution which Hardie was to move in parliament, suggesting that they pass similar resolutions and send them to the Prime Minister, the President of the Local Government Board, and to local M.P.'s. It was further suggested that information concerning local unemployment should be sent to Hardie so that he could use accurate local figures to support his case in parliament.[2] Penny's letter was backed by a

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1 N.U.G.W.& G.L., Quarterly Balance Sheet, 27 September, 1902, p 6.

2 Hardie in fact used some of the information he received - in February 1903. See Hansard, 4th Series, CXVIII, 247-53. 18 February, 1903. The following provided it: trades councils in Manchester, Llanelly, Dundee, Briton Ferry, Darwen, West Bromwich, Stockton, Croydon, Long Eaton, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, and Northampton. See Labour Leader, January 1903, passim; London Trades and Labour Gazette, February 1903, pp 7-8.

vigorous literature campaign, two editions of the I.L.P.Platform being issued which dealt exclusively with unemployment.

In London's east end, where distress was always bad, the S.D.F. took over a series of protest meetings organised by a local evangelist from Edmonton and led a number of protest deputations to the council, a proceedure which was also adopted in Bermondsey.[1] But such methods were not effective enough for some S.D.F. members and these men advocated the use of more extreme means to secure action on behalf of the unemployed. A.A.Watts, for example, appealed to all members to "foster and guide this rebellion against compulsory starvation."[2] Harry Quelch said that it was hardly surprising that officialdom refused to believe that the situation was bad. "As there is neither rioting nor bloodshed - why, there can be no distress."[3]

Although Hardie and John Burns harried the government in the house of commons they could make little impression on the official attitude that the situation was normal despite the fact that the percentage of unemployed trade unionists had been persistently higher than in the previous year.[4] At the end of November Walter Long, the President of the Local Government Board, told Burns that he would only consider re-issuing the 1893 circular if it became expedient, a

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1 Justice, 20 September, 1902.

2 Ibid., 4 October, 1902.

3 Ibid., 3 January, 1903.

4 See Table 1.

statement which brought a solemn warning from the Labour Leader that such prevarication would lead to "sullen or riotous discontent" on the part of the unemployed.[1] On 10 December Hardie asked Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister, if one parliamentary sitting before the recess could be devoted to a discussion of the unemployed problem, and more particularly to his motion that the government should enforce minimum wages, restrict working hours to eight per day, and empower local authorities to purchase land for cultivation by the unemployed. Although he admitted that he had not had time to make full inquiries Balfour urbanely dismissed Hardie by suggesting that he was exaggerating the gravity of the situation, and declared that no good could come from such a discussion.[2] Two days later Hardie was prevented by the Speaker from introducing a debate on his motion that the government make a grant in aid of £100,000 to the local authorities, but not to be so easily silenced he published next day in The Times a letter in which he used the Board of Trade's own figures to emphasise the serious state of the labour market.[3] Burns then took up the cudgels again, asking on 17 December whether the government would now re-issue Chamberlain's 1893 circular, while Hardie again took the opportunity to press for his £100,000. At last

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1 Labour Leader, 6 December, 1902.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CXVI, 666-68. 10 December, 1902.

3 The Times, 13 December, 1902.

Long admitted that the situation in London was giving rise to some concern, but he emphasised that in the country generally the situation was normal.[1] The following day Hardie made one last bid to secure the money which he wished the local authorities to have, but he received only the same negative reply, this time from Ritchie, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.[2]

Thus in spite of the resolutions, the demonstrations, and the persistence of Hardie and Barnes in parliament, nothing had been gained on the national front when the politicians went into recess for Christmas. It is true that a Labour Bureaux (London) Bill had been given the royal assent the previous July, but although the government had supported this measure in a half hearted way, it had been introduced by six private members, all of whom sat for east end constituencies, and was merely designed to transfer to the London boroughs the optional power to open labour registries which had been formerly held by the vestries.[3] The government's attitude to the measure was well illustrated when Lord Balfour of Burleigh was criticised during its first reading in the house of lords because no representative of the Local Government Board was present. "If this

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CXVI, 1501-02. 17 December, 1902.

2 Ibid., 1628. 18 December, 1902.

3 The M.P.'s were T.Lough (West Islington), J.Burns (Battersea) R.Cremer (Shoreditch, Haggerston), C.Norton (West Newington), C.Hay (Shoreditch, Hoxton), and Harry Samuel (Tower Hamlets, Limehouse).

had been a matter of first class importance," he said, "I am sure that he (Lord Kenyon, Local Government Board Representative in the upper house) would have communicated with the noble lord opposite and asked him to postpone the Bill for a day or so."[1]

The lack of interest apparent in this statement was still in evidence in the general complacency towards the unemployment question exhibited by most politicians during the last days of the year. As well as refusing to give time for a discussion on Hardie's motion, the government, in the person of Walter Long, had refused also to receive a deputation from the London Trades Council. On Christmas Eve Campbell Bannerman told an audience at Culross that the most important social questions facing the country were housing and temperance.[2] The indifference was reflected also in many sections of the government press. The Morning Post, for example, stated that nothing needed to be done until the existing agencies of relief had been proved inadequate or incompetent, and that the situation certainly did not warrant the socialists' demands for local and national axtion of an extraordinary nature.[3] There was, however, a perceptible softening in the public attitude towards the unemployed although this probably owed

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CX, 814. 4 July, 1902.

2 The Times, 25 December, 1902.

3 Morning Post, 11 December, 1902.

as much to the season and to the constant appeals for aid which emanated from the east end and certain provincial cities as it did to socialist agitation. In the weeks before Christmas the Daily News was moved to open a food fund for needy east end families, while the Daily Graphic conceded that most social workers shared the socialists' assessment of the position.[1] The Gazette expressed the view that the government should at least consider the matter.[2]

Oddly enough, the official complacency was shared by two groups of which one might have expected differently. One was the unemployed themselves. Justice complained in November that "it is idle to expect much help from the unemployed themselves."[3] A month later the editor was again bemoaning the fact that although "we have sacrificed ourself on your behalf (i.e. the unemployed) . . . you have scorned us in the past and you laugh us to scorn today."[4] The trade unions also came in for editorial wrath and the leaders were condemned as "too timid", the rank and file as "too stupid."[5] Certainly the T.U.C. had shown no interest in the unemployed question, a fact which had prompted the editor of the I.L.P.Platform to appeal to those still in work not to

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1 Daily Graphic, 11 December, 1902.

2 Westminster Gazette, 13 December, 1902.

3 Justice, 29 November, 1902.

4 Ibid., 20 December, 1902.

5 Ibid., 29 November, 1902.

assume that they were immune from the danger of unemployment.[1] Although most unions had had bad years in 1902 very few of the annual reports concerned themselves with unemployment in its wider implications. The General Union of Operative Carpenters and Joiners, paid out more unemployment money than at any time in its history, but the annual report suggested that after the Taff Vale decision, the most important questions which faced the working class were housing and transport.[2] The shipwrights had their highest unemployment expenditure for four years but unemployment was not mentioned in their report.[3] The general attitude, certainly among the craft unions, was one of confidence in their financial resources to carry them through. The only real sign of discontent came from a small group of carpenters who called for the T.U.C. to press for the restriction of alien immigration as foreign cabinet makers were putting them out of work.[4] Nor were the general unions apparently very alarmed, being content to seek for solutions within the context of their own trade. In January 1903, for example, the executive of the National Amalgamated Union of Labour decided to call a conference of their members to discuss the limitation

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1 I.L.P.Platform, 13 December, 1902.

2 G.U.O.C.J., Annual Report, 1902, p 4.

3 A.S.S., Annual Report, 1902, p xiii.

4 A.S.C.J., Monthly Report, March 1902, p 99.

of overtime as an answer to rising unemployment.[1] Pete Curran hoped that all his members would devote themselves to thinking out the best methods of tackling the problem.[2]

In spite of this general lack of concern several unions were in fact represented at a meeting convened on 15 December by the Metropolitan District Council of the I.L.P., by which time it had become clear that the government did not intend to take any immediate action. The purpose of the meeting was to consider what could be done for the unemployed and - more significantly - to see whether any permanent organisation could be set up to co-ordinate action, a move which may have been inspired by the failure of what had hitherto been very spasmodic and localised agitation. Although the meeting was summoned by the I.L.P. and chaired by Hardie, the delegates included several radicals, such as Alden and Edward Pickersgill, as well as Bernard Shaw, Cunninghame Graham, and Ramsay MacDonald. The outcome was the creation of a committee of thirty, somewhat unwieldy but presumably necessary to accomodate the various interests represented at the meeting. Among the members of this committee were Alden, Hardie, S.G.Hobson, and E.R.Pease of the Labour Representation Committee. Thus the creation of this committee did in fact co-ordinate several

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1 N.A.U.L., E.C.Minutes, 2 January, 1903.

2 N.U.G.W.& G.L., Quarterly Balance Sheet, 29 March, 1903, p 6.

important sources of labour power which were well able to make their influence felt in important sectors of the community. Hardie could act as spokesman in parliament; Alden was not only a Fabian but a member of the Mansion House Committee; Pease and MacDonald could presumably bring the power of the L.R.C. to back the committee's efforts, while Hobson and Shaw could bring in the sophisticated propaganda machinery of the Fabian Society.[1]

As secretary the delegates appointed Percy Alden, and despite the I.L.P.'s role in arranging the inaugural meeting, his in fact was the inspiration behind it. In an article in the Labour Leader he outlined the aims and structure of the new National Unemployed Committee. Under the heading of permanent objectives he listed the establishment of a government department to deal exclusively with unemployment, and which was to be responsible for notification of impending distress, the publication of information as to the availability of work, and the organisation of unemployed labour on road, forest, and farm colony works. Temporary expedients for which the committee was to press included the opening of local employment offices, shelters for the homeless poor, and the immediate implementation of works already scheduled by local authorities. To secure unity of action a national conference of representatives of local authorities, trade unions, and

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1 Hobson and Pease had both been investigating unemployment for a Fabian committee. See Fabian Society, E.C.Minutes, 24 June, 1902.

other interested bodies was to be summoned early in the new year. The central committee was to sit in London and give information to the press, while it was hoped to form similar committees on the same pattern in all the great provincial cities.[1]

Early in 1903 Alden sent out invitations to all organisation thought to be interested in the N.U.C., asking them to appoint two delegates each to the national conference fixed for 27 and 28 February. The delegates, 587 of them, duly assembled, and the opening speeches were delivered by Sir Albert Rollitt M.P., Sir John Gorst M.P., and the aristocratic socialist, Lady Frances Warwick. The speeches set the tone for the rest of the conference in that they showed no agreement at all as to the best remedies for unemployment and were generally long and irrelevant. Rollitt suggested co-operation between national and local authorities. Gorst favoured labour bureaux, while Lady Warwick championed farm colonies. Hardie was responsible for moving the first resolution which declared that the responsibility for finding work for the unemployed should be the joint responsibility of the national and local authorities, a proposal which brought some opposition from John Burns, who said that he was against any interference in municipal politics. The second resolution was moved on the

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1 Labour Leader, 27 December, 1902.

Saturday by Canon Scott Holland in favour of the government providing decent work for the unemployed, and he was followed by MacDonald, who urged that local authorities should be pressed to take some action. But the most significant resolution was the fourth, moved by George Barnes, "that a permanent National Organisation be formed in order to give effect to the decisions of the Conference, and that the Provisional Committee be re-appointed, with power to add to its number."[1]

The conference was barely noticed in the press. The Westminster Gazette devoted one paragraph to attacking Gorst's speech which, it claimed, was sure to make unpleasant reading for the government front bench.[2] Elsewhere, regret was expressed that the resolutions had been so "vague and incoherent", and it was difficult to avoid this charge.[3] How was responsibility to be fastened on to the local authorities? What precisely did Scott Holland mean by the phrase "decent work", and what did MacDonald hope to achieve by pressurising local councils for in many cases labour organisations were already doing this with little success? The resolutions were also dismissed by the Railway Review, which did, however, welcome the formation of the committee, and it is

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1 Labour Leader, 7 March, 1903.

2 Westminster Gazette, 28 February, 1903.

3 Daily Mail, 2 March, 1903.

perhaps significant that Hardie himself declared that the conference had only laid down broad principles to which the committee would seek to give detailed expression.[1]

The Social Democrats were highly critical of the whole affair, possibly because it may have disappointed their expectations that it would result in the unemployed being organised to make a thorough nuisance of themselves.[2] Possibly they may have been jealous because the leadership of the unemployed movement threatened to pass out of their hands into the control of a very broadly based body whose work for the unemployed had no ulterior motive and which was committed to a moderate programme. The conference was only important in the eyes of Harry Quelch because of its representative nature. The proceedings had been too theoretical, irrelevant, and farcial. Hardie, it was alleged, had done his best to suppress the S.D.F. delegates and had appeared anxious to prevent anything which might have offended the class susceptibilities of such an august gathering. Finally, Quelch complained, the L.T.C., which was the most important labour organisation represented after the T.U.C., had been given practically no say, a complaint which may have been connected with the fact that the L.T.C. contained a fair number of Social Democrats, and that it had been

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1 Railway Review, 6 March, 1903.

2 A hope expressed in Justice, 7 February, 1903.

co-operating closely with the S.D.F. in putting pressure on the Local Government Board to do something for the unemployed.[1]

Some of the S.D.F. hostility towards the formation of the N.U.C. may simply have been due to the fact that it had not been consulted over the formation of the latter organisation. Indeed, early in 1903 the S.D.F. had formed its own committee to organise agitation in London, chiefly in the form of street processions, which had been suggested by J.Hunter Watts. These processions had a dual purpose, besides the obvious one of showing that the working classes could rely on the Social Democrats to champion their interests. The marches were designed partly to collect money for the unemployed, and partly to put physical pressure on the authorities. The provincial branches were left very much to their own devices although branch secretaries were invited to contact the London organisers in order to co-ordinate tactics, so the national vision of the N.U.C. had apparently not gone unnoticed by the S.D.F. Two full time organisers, H. and J.Martin, were despatched to the east end, and they travelled from area to area instructing local leaders how to organise the unemployed and, more importantly, how to stir them from their apathy - by financial incentive.[2] In Edmonton six unemployed workers were

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1 *Justice*, 1 March, 1903.

2 It is interesting to note that H.Martin later joined the Peckham branch of the S.P.G.B. He was expelled in April 1905 for "co-operating with capitalist politicians" in a local unemployed committee. See S.P.G.B., *E.C.Minutes*, 1 April, 1905.

arrested for begging during a street march, and the chairman of the local S.D.F. branch seized his chance of martyrdom - and stood bail for them.[1] The Mile End and Shoreditch Branches organised marches into the heart of the west end, and the federation was also active in Poplar, Southwark, and Hackney. By mid-January Justice was claiming that the east end was ablaze with federation agitation, there being 1200 men marched into the west end every other day.[2] The culmination of the campaign was reached on the eve of the re-assembling of parliament, when a monster rally was held in Trafalgar Square and unemployed men were marched in simultaneously from almost every district of the east end. The report in Justice claimed that 3,500 people were present, and the various speakers, who included James Macdonald, editor of the London Trades and Labour Gazette, W.C.Steadman, C.Lehane, the fiery Irishman who was soon to leave the party to form another, Harry Quelch, and H.C.Phillips, all took the chance to attack not only the supineness of the government, but also the press, the leisured classes, and the charity organisations. They expressed themselves satisfied, however, when it was announced that Long had at last consented to receive the deputation so often rejected in the past, although the secretary of the unemployed committee warned that if satisfaction was not given, then the marches and demonstrations,

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1 Justice, 3 January, 1903.

2 Ibid., 17 January, 1903.

scheduled to stop, would be recommenced.[1]

The Labour Leader's report of the demonstration stated that not more than 2,000 were present, and its generally cool attitude towards the S.D.F. effort was in accord with the feeling of several other labour leaders, for there were signs that as well as alarming the authorities and private individuals, the S.D.F. street campaign was irritating some unions and labour moderates.[2] Even Hardie, while giving full credit to the concept of street marches and large centralised demonstrations, thought that the number had been overdone and that one per week would have sufficed. He totally disapproved of the "way in which these agitations on behalf of the unemployed are taken occasion of to boom some particular organisation."[3] In part the I.L.P. leaders probably resented the S.D.F. claim, made in January, that it was "the only organisation that is taking up the unemployed question in real earnest", for the I.L.P. had not been idle even though its efforts had been largely in the hands of local leaders and nothing akin to the S.D.F. committee had been established.[4] In Manchester, for example, I.L.P. pressure resulted in the opening of a labour registry, while in South Shields, Willesden, and Clapham, it was

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1 Justice, 21 February, 1903. The Times, 16 February, 1903, said that although 2000 were present, only 500-600 were unemployed, the rest being police, officials, etc.

2 Labour Leader, 21 February, 1903.

3 Ibid.

4 Justice, 31 January, 1903.

the I.L.P., rather than the S.D.F., which led the unemployed deputations to the local councils.[1] John Burns was another labour leader who was alarmed by the processions, going so far as to ask the government to stop them[2]. At least one union, the G.U.O.C.J., proudly boasted that none of its members were to be found in the street processions because they were too busy looking for work.[3] The Operative Bricklayers Society, another union badly affected by unemployment, refused to answer an appeal from the S.D.F. unemployment committee for financial help, prefering to organise relief for its unemployed members in London by using the resources of the London District Levy Fund.[4] It is interesting to note on the other hand that the O.B.S. did appoint delegates to attend the N.U.C. conference at the end of February.[5]

Many working men then seem to have been worried by the adverse publicity which the unemployed were receiving through their identification in the public mind with the S.D.F. and the street marches. Hardie in particular seems to have been afraid of alienating

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1 I.L.P.News, February 1903: Labour Leader, 7 February, 1903.

2 See the allegations concerning this which were made against him in parliament. Hansard, 4th Series, CXXV, 123. 8 July, 1903.

3 G.U.O.C.J., London District Committee, Half Yearly Report, 31 January, 1903, p 1.

4 O.B.S., Trade Circular and General Reporter, February 1903, pp 8-11.

5 Ibid., March 1903, p 6.

public sympathy from the unemployed with the N.U.C. conference due to be held at the end of February. There can be little doubt that the London marches caused a great deal of inconvenience to the general public and the authorities. Throughout the campaign letters appeared constantly in the press protesting against the marches, although the Daily News published one or two in favour as well. The main burden of the correspondents' complaints was that the marchers were a nuisance and blocked the streets causing traffic hold-ups; that the police were too tolerant; that the marchers were being encouraged to rely on public charity instead of on their own efforts; and that many of the participants were wastrels if not pure frauds. One letter from the chairman of the Clapham and Wandsworth Guardians, for example, claimed that the superintendent of the local casual wards had recently recognised in an unemployed procession "several hundreds" who frequently appeared before him as vagrants.[1] The managing director of the Central Cyclone Company asserted that his employees regularly took time off work to join in the marches because they were so profitable.[2] Allegations of this nature clearly worried some of the S.D.F. organisers, for when one of them was interviewed by W.Carlile, he referred to the "worry and anxiety caused by loafers taking part."[3]

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1 The Times, 9 February, 1903.

2 Ibid., 26 February, 1903.

3 W.Carlile, "The problem of London's unemployed", Cornhill Magazine, XIV (March 1903), p 362.

Typical of the press attitude to the marches was the remark that "they contain among them a small proprtion of the deserving, a considerable proportion of hardened and habitual loafers, and a good many more on the verge."[1] In a letter to Lord Knollys, Akers Douglas, the Home Secretary, summed up aptly the general feeling and his own difficulties.

> 'Please tell the King that these Processions have been engaging the most anxious attention of the Commissioner of Police and myself, and that we are using to the utmost the powers which we posess.
>
> The two points in which these Processions are most objectionable are the collecting of money, and the obstruction of traffic.
>
> On the first point our hands are tied by a decision of the High Court in 1886 of which the gist is that if a person, not as a regular mode of living, but for some object not in itself unlawful, goes from house to house and solicits subscriptions that is not within the prohibitions of begging in the Vagrancy Act . . . . Of course if a man with a collecting box resorts to intimidation or otherwise brings himself into conflict with the law the Police can, and will stop him . . . .
>
> On the other point, processions are not in themselves illegal. . . and until the progress of a procession causes an unreasonable obstruction of traffic the Police have no right to interfere. . . . It has been asserted that the Police are protecting the Processionists but that is not so. The Police are there to protect the Public by regulating to the best of their ability the whole traffic of the streets.' [2]

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1 Westminster Gazette, 14 February, 1903.

2 A.Akers Douglas to Lord Knollys, 12 February, 1903. Chilston Papers. Kent Archives Office, U 564. CLP 7, ff 10-11.

In the same letter he went on to say that he had reason to believe that "the Public are beginning to see the stupidity of contributing to these 'Unemployed' - and that in consequence the collections are falling off."[1]

But if the claims of the Cyclone Company director were in fact true the marches must have been securing some degree of public sympathy and generosity, and certainly the first few weeks of the new year found several public bodies taking a marked interest in the unemployed problem. In February the C.O.S. held a public meeting on the subject while the L.C.C. called a conference in the middle of the same month, at which the labour representatives, led by Will Crooks, were vociferous in their demands for the compilation of lists of necessary public works on which the unemployed could be immediately set to work.[2] Most significant of all however, was the changed attitude of the government itself, which contrasted strangely with its pre-Christmas complacency. H.Llewellyn Smith of the civil service was commissioned to draw up a memorandum on the position of employment and trade, which was discussed in a cabinet meeting at the end of March.[3] The first sign of concern had come when, shortly after parliament re-assembled, Colonel Legge, member for Hanover Square in

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1 A.Akers Douglas to Lord Knollys, 12 February, 1903. Chilston Papers. Kent Archives Office, U 564. CLP 7, f 11.

2 The Times, 14 February, 1903.

3 Memorandum on the present position of employment and trade. PRO.CAB. 37/64. 30 March, 1903.

the west end, asked the Home Secretary if he was aware of the inconvenience caused by the processions and whether it was proposed to take any action. Akers Douglas replied that the police had done their best to cope, but it was certainly a matter for consideration as to whether their powers should be increased.[1] In fact, it was only three months before he presented a memorandum to the cabinet on the subject. He reported that the police precautions against the marches had been successful but "I am assured by the Commissioner of Police that the margin of safety was slight, and that the strain on the police, at the best, unduly heavy." In London, the memorandum continued, one man in four had been occupied in marshalling the processions between 1 January and 18 February, and as the situation could easily get out of hand in another winter Akers Douglas suggested that the Metropolitan Street Act should be amended to increase police powers to prevent the marchers collecting money. If the freedom to collect was removed or limited the marches, he felt, would probably "peter out." In conclusion he emphasised that "the matter is one of great importance" and urged that the necessary legislation be introduced "without delay."[2] A bill was introduced within three weeks of the cabinet discussion and reached the

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CXVIII, 137. 18 February, 1903.

2 'Unemployed' processions. PRO.CAB. 37/65. 22 May, 1903.

committee stage without debate. Here it ran into some opposition from Liberals who felt that to amend section 11 of the Metropolitan Streets Act "did not deal with the question as to whether a person had or had not the right to collect money for charitable purposes . . . ."[1] But when the Home Secretary made it clear that he wanted the measure and also that he considered it adequate for his purpose it passed rapidly through both houses and received the royal assent on 11 August.

That the government was alarmed, if not actually afraid of the processions, is suggested very strongly by a curious little episode involving Walter Long and the joint S.D.F.-L.T.C. unemployed committee. In January Long had refused to see a deputation from this committee but in February, when the S.D.F. campaign was at its height, he wrote to suggest that they send a joint deputation, submitting beforehand a list of the points which they wished to discuss. On 11 February his secretary told the S.D.F. that the day suggested for the meeting was not convenient and that Long would decide on a suitable day.[2] It will be remembered that the announcement of Long's willingness to meet the deputation led the committee secretary to state publicly at the Trafalgar Square demonstration that the marches

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1 E.Caldwell in the debate. Hansard, 4th Series, CXXV, 121. 8 July, 1903.

2 London Trades and Labour Gazette, March 1903, p 10.

would be called off.[1] On 25 February, by which time the S.D.F. organisers had ceased work and Justice had stated that the Trafalgar Square demonstration had ended one phase of the campaign, Long wrote again to the committee saying that there had been so much discussion of the question in parliament that he did not now think it worth seeing the deputation, as he would only repeat what he had said in parliament.[2] It would be too much to suggest that this was a carefully thought out manouvre on Long's part to outwit the S.D.F., especially as he may have been unaware of Hardie's intention of moving an unemployment amendment on the King's Speech. But it remains true that the government was concerned about the marches; that Long's willingness to see the deputation contributed to their cessation; and that once a public statement to this effect had been made by the organisers, he changed his mind.[3]

It would be wrong to maintain that the street marches alone were responsible for the government's changed attitude. Indeed Gerald Balfour declared on 12 February that "at the present time we have reached a pitch of wealth and prosperity which we have never touched before."[4] Some weight must therefore be given to the work of the

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1 See pp 51-2.

2 Justice, 21 February, 1903: London Trades and Labour Gazette, March 1903, p 11.

3 If Long had been in the habit of studying Justice, certainly a remote possibility, he would have been aware of the S.D.F.'s unemployment committee's financial difficulties.

4 The Times, 13 February, 1903.

N.U.C., the complaints of east end social workers, and also to the amendment which Hardie moved during the parliamentary debate on the King's Speech regretting the omission of any measure empowering local authorities to acquire land for cultivation and for setting up undertakings on which the unemployed could be found work. Emphasising the gravity of the situation and supporting his arguments with statistics obtained in reply to Penny's circular, he went on to point out the need for national organisation of industry to increase the amount of available work, and also the need to provide sources of employment which could be expanded or contracted as the need arose. The debate was adjourned and when it was resumed the following day, Hardie advocated the creation of a labour ministry and increasing local authority powers, before he gave way to Burns who was seconding the amendment. Burns immediately paid tribute to the effect of the street marches, although he shared the popular doubts about the participants.

> 'I believe that the recent unemployed processions, bad though some of them were, and composed almost entirely of unemployables mixed up with a few wastrels, have brought home to this big city the fact that the unemployed problem requires to be dealt with.' [1]

When Burns sat down Jesse Collings rose to reply on behalf of the

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CXVIII, 307. 19 February, 1903.

government and he dealt methodically with the suggestions of the two labour men, ending with the sneer that Hardie would be better employed addressing his remarks to the county councils rather than to the house of commons. The debate then drifted aimlessly on but Hardie must have been gratified when the vote was taken, to find that he had 161 supporters, though less pleased that slightly less than half of the house had bothered to vote. His supporters included the trade unionists Abraham, Fenwick, and Yoxall, as well as several of the Liberal radicals - Lloyd George, Samuel, Buxton, and Dilke.[1] Most of these were soundly castigated by the government press which claimed that they had not bothered to think Hardie's proposals out to their logical conclusions.[2]

By the middle of the summer the various organisations in the labour movement were taking stock. The craft unions had shown remarkably little interest in the activities of the various unemployed committees, beyond attending the N.U.C. meeting, and those which had been hit by unemployment preferred to settle their difficulties internally. Although the government was concerned by the unrest the agitators had secured little in the way of positive action. Thus it was that in the spring and early summer of 1903 extremists in both

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1 For the debate see Hansard, 4th Series, CXVIII, 247-346. 18-19 February, 1903.

2 See, for example, Daily Graphic, 20 February, 1903: Morning Post, 20 February, 1903.

main socialist parties were active in demanding more vigorous policies on the unemployment question. In the I.L.P. one section seems to have been very concerned that their policy was barely discernible from that of advanced Liberals, a suspicion which must have been heightened by the co-operation of I.L.P. leaders with those of all shades of opinion, in the N.U.C. Several rank and filers wanted a more active and a more distinctly socialist policy. An article in the Labour Leader by H.Wishart gained considerable support from correspondents because he had suggested as the rallying call for a national campaign the slogan "work for all", on the grounds that Liberals, who were all capitalists, could not possibly support such a demand as it cut at the very roots of capitalism.[1]

In the S.D.F. the problem was more deep seated, questioning the very policy of agitating for the unemployed, a factor which in a way symbolised the internal struggle in the party between the old guard and the "impossibilists", most of whom were expelled at the stormy 1903 conference. There was also the more mundane, but nonetheless real problem of finance. The unemployed organisers had depended on appeals made in Justice to sustain them, and although the paper claimed

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1 Labour Leader, 6 June, 1903. See also ibid., 27 June, 1903; 25 July, 1903; 10 October, 1903.

that the response had been generally good, the annual report in April showed that the financial position of the federation was critical and considerable inroads had been made in to the Central Election Fund in order to finance all aspects of the work, which included the organising of the unemployed.[1] Nor had the agitation brought them any long term political advantage in the way of mass conversions. As The Times pointed out with a deal of truth:

> 'The Federation will, in the long run, gain nothing in popular esteem . . . the class which will walk in the processions is traditionally ungrateful, and it seems to be generally understood that it will throw the S.D.F. overboard as soon as may be convenient.' [2]

(ii)

With the onset of summer providing, as it usually did, better weather to ease the situation in seasonal industries, such as building, the unemployed ceased temporarily to be a matter of public concern. In the building trades the percentage of unemployed trade unionists fell from 6.4 in January to 3.6 in August. The unemployed in the furniture trades had declined from 8.1% in January to 2.2% in

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1 S.D.F., Annual Report, 1903, p 17.

2 The Times, 28 January, 1903.

June, while the mean average of all unemployed trade unionists was 4.0% in May, 4.5% in June, and 4.9% in July, less than the winter months but significantly higher than the previous year, and already showing signs of rising in a month which was normally a very good one for employment.[1] By September the figure had risen to 5.8% and Justice sounded a warning note, pointing out that many men had already been laid off in south London, Lancashire, and Birmingham, and predicting a return to the hard times of the previous winter.[2] But it was the N.U.C. which was the first to take positive action, re-assembling on 10 October, a move welcomed by the Daily News on the grounds that last year the committee had met too late to achieve anything.[3] Although its activities since the Guildhall conference had not been very public - one writer to the Labour Leader had asked if it was still in existence - it soon became clear that the committee had been quite busy during the summer.[4] At the opening meeting a letter was read from the Prime Minister refusing to see a deputation and suggesting that they should approach the Board of Trade about the extension of the Labour Bureaux (London) Act, and the other Guildhall resolutions which concerned that department. The

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1 Table 1.

2 Justice, 19 September, 1903.

3 Daily News, 10 October, 1903.

4 The letter appeared in the Labour Leader, 19 September, 1903.

committee decided to put pressure on the L.C.C. to summon an early meeting of the local authorities, to ask the President of the Board of Trade, the Free Church conference, and Arthur Balfour (again) to receive deputations, the latter on the subject of the need to appoint a labour minister. It was further decided to ask the Local Government Board to implement the recommendations of the 1895 Commons Committee on the Want of Employment with reference to disfranchisement. While the negotiations involved in this programme were proceeding, the committee decided to devote its energies to collecting local unemployment statistics from trades councils, an activity pursued so vigorously that it attracted considerable attention from local journalists.[1]

The S.D.F. still had nothing to do with the N.U.C., James Macdonald condemning its demands as "very tame."[2] In November Justice appealed to all federation members to spare no effort in setting under way a vigorous agitation for the unemployed.[3] But the Home Secretary, alerted by his experiences of the previous winter, lost no time in utilising the legislation which he had so recently carried through parliament, and on 7 November the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police issued regulations under the Metropolitan Streets Amendment Act to enable the police to keep a more stringent

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1 This account is based on reports in the Morning Post, 12 October, 1903: London Trades and Labour Gazette, January 1904, pp 8-9.

2 London Trades and Labour Gazette, December 1903, p 1.

3 Justice, 7 November, 1903.

check on the activities of the marchers. No collection was to be taken in the streets except as specified in a special permit which could only be obtained from the Commissioner. Applications for these permits had to be made to New Scotland Yard ten days in advance of the collection, stating its date, purpose, place, and the number of collectors involved. They were only valid on the specified days and were to be produced on demand. No more than two collectors were to be positioned in any one spot, and without adult supervision no child of less than fourteen could collect. Tables, and boxes on poles (to reach upper floor windows) were both forbidden unless expressly allowed, and no collector was to annoy passers by. Breach of these regulations was punishable under section 12 of the Metropolitan Streets Act of 1867.[1] Justice declared indignantly that "the seamy side of our civilisation is to be turned in by police brutality, and Mr.Akers Douglas will declare with pride that 'order reigns in London' -as in Warsaw."[2] Certainly the regulations were sufficiently wide, and in some cases, vague, to destroy the ease of financial collection which had been a strong incentive to the marchers.

It was therefore fortunate for the S.D.F. that they applied only to the region in a six mile area around Charing Cross, and the

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1 Morning Post, 9 November, 1903.

2 Justice, 12 December, 1903.

collectors could still flourish in the east end of London and in provincial cities. Thus in Reading the local branch organised an unemployed committee to foster agitation on the same lines as in the previous winter, while at Northampton James Gribble, a prominent local member of the S.D.F., secured election as chairman of the council's special committee on unemployment.[1] In December the London District Council of the federation established a small committee to co-ordinate the unemployment work of the London branches, but the effectiveness of the government's prompt action can be seen both in the decline of organised S.D.F. agitation, and in the resort to N.U.C. methods, for the L.D.C. appealed to the localities to supply them with relevant statistics.

To some extent the effectiveness of the S.D.F. agitation was offset in London by the swift response of many of the borough councils to the growth of unemployment. How far the early meeting of the L.C.C. to discuss the situation was due to N.U.C. pressure is not possible to determine. Certainly the N.U.C. contained men whose comparatively moderate opinions probably made them more sure of a hearing in the L.C.C. than did the S.D.F, for example, and the N.U.C. had decided to press for an early meeting of the L.C.C. On the other hand the

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1 *Justice*, 26 December, 1903.

council's general purposes committee, chaired by Burns, had been considering the report of the L.C.C. unemployment conference, held the previous February, for some time before the full council discussed it on 28 October. As November passed into December the monthly journals, particularly the Toynbee Record, began to carry numerous articles on the growing distress, especially that in the east end, charitable appeals appeared with almost monotonous regularity in the daily press, and there came the most striking evidence yet that London meant to tackle the problem. On 3 December the Mansion House Committee, whose functions had been in abeyance since 1895, was re-called. It resolved to organise a system of relief for a selected number of men on the lines of a plan which had recently appeared in the press. This scheme, the work of a number of prominent east end figures, including Canon Barnett and W.C.Steadman of the L.C.C., devolved on the selected men, all of whom were to have established homes as a precondition of selection, taking work in the country, their wages going to their families. This, it was argued, would avoid the necessity of breaking up homes, and would also ensure that no shirkers would apply. It had the further advantage that although it required financial backing of between £15,000 - £20,000, the work could be readily undertaken at the existing farm colonies at Osea Island, Hadleigh, and Lingfield.

One aspect of relief schemes against which labour and radical sentiment had always been strong was the separation of an unemployed man from his home and family, and Alden, who was a member of the Mansion House Committee, immediately protested against the adoption of the plan, arguing that the same effect could be achieved by giving each council 20/- per unemployed man in order to finance local unemployment works.[1] Whether he was acting as an individual or, as seems possible, as spokesman for the N.U.C., his protest apparently had some effect. When the sub-committee appointed to consider the plan reported on 22 December, it stated that it had in fact approached the London boroughs asking them if they were prepared to undertake local works, and only Poplar had replied in the affirmative.[2] Alden immediately refuted this in a letter to the press, claiming that the report was inaccurate. Only five councils had been contacted besides Poplar, and of these five, three had agreed to start works, one was still considering the matter, and the other was receiving enough charitable aid to finance local works already.[3]

The I.L.P. meanwhile, apart from efforts by its local leaders and the activities of its representatives on the N.U.C., had done little

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1 Daily Graphic, 4 December, 1903.

2 Ibid., 23 December, 1903.

3 Ibid., 24 December, 1903.

for the unemployed. It had concentrated its energies throughout the autumn on a campaign against Chamberlain's proposals for tariff reform and imperial preference, and this campaign had attracted considerable adverse comment from local leaders who demanded a more positive line on the unemployed question. Fred Wood, an I.L.P. figure of some importance in Huddersfield, appealed for the party to forget everything, especially the fiscal question, and to lead a national crusade to press the needs of the unemployed.[1] This was repeated in January 1904, in a letter from E.Lees, who wanted to know why so much time was being given - and wasted - on the fiscal controversy.[2] The disquiet of the rank and file was also evident in the fact that five branches sent in resolutions on unemployment for consideration at the annual conference, compared with only one the previous year. Although Hardie was, as usual, waging virtually a lone battle on behalf of the unemployed in the commons, he openly stated during the debate on the King's Speech in February 1904, that he was the spokesman of the N.U.C., which could have done little to sooth the fears of the extremer elements in the I.L.P., expressed during the previous summer.

When the Royal Speech was under discussion Hardie moved an amendment regretting the fact that no mention had been made of the

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1 Labour Leader, 12 December, 1903.

2 Ibid., 9 January, 1904.

need to establish a labour ministry, and in a wide ranging speech he discussed most of the practical remedies which he had long been advocating in the press - inducing men back to the land, afforestation schemes, but above all the creation of a ministry of labour to be concerned exclusively with unemployment and which should undertake the establishment of a national system of labour bureaux.[1] In advocating this Hardie was openly backing the policy of the N.U.C., for as he admitted during the debate, labour men were divided about the usefulness of such a post. About all that Hardie achieved for his efforts, however, was a more sympathetic press because he was, as usual, defeated. The Daily News praised Crooks, who had seconded the amendment, for having the courage to admit that some of the unemployed were loafers, while the Westminster Gazette expressed the view that Hardie had put his case with moderation and declared itself particularly impressed with his advocacy of afforestation.[2] On the extreme left of the socialist movement, however, the Socialist Labour Party, another splinter from the S.D.F., castigated Crooks as an enemy of his class, and opined that Hardie was more like a philanthropic tory than a socialist.[3]

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1 For the debate see Hansard, 4th Series, CXXX, 451-506. 19 February, 1904.

2 Daily News, 20 February, 1904: Westminster Gazette, 20 February, 1904.

3 Socialist, March 1904.

During his speech Hardie made much of the tariff reform issue on which the I.L.P. was still concentrating its attention, admitting that the tariff reformers had a strong case in suggesting that the solution to unemployment lay in a reform of the country's fiscal structure. In part of course, the I.L.P. concern was due simply to the fact that as a party hoping to win seats in parliament through the L.R.C. it could not determine the issues on which an election was to be fought, nor could it ignore a topic which so dominated public interest. But there was also the fact, as Hardie pointed out, that tariff reform was being emphasised as an unemployment solution, and Justice admitted that the fiscal reformers were benefitting from the current distress.[1] Maltman Barry wrote to The Times.

> 'And inasmuch as one of the objects of Mr.Chamberlain's policy is to furnish that security of continuous employment, every friend of British workmen must support that policy . . . . The present amount of unemployment in this country is very great, and I agree that the increased trade which would come to us as a result of Mr.Chamberlain's policy would absorb the whole of it.'[2]

It seems that at least some of the I.L.P. leaders appreciated the danger of the connection in the public mind between full employment

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1 Justice, 31 October, 1903.

2 The Times, 7 November, 1903.

and tariff reform.[1] Certainly several leading advocates of fiscal change expected working men to support Chamberlain. W.A.S.Hewins wrote to Sidney Webb in June 1903 predicting that "some groups will be against him, but you must remember that the working classes have on the whole shown themselves protectionist."[2] Earlier, Leo Maxse, editor of the National Review, had confidently told Sidney Buxton that "you will also find that the policy excites great enthusiasm among our working classes."[3] Nor were these predictions entirely without foundation, hence the concern of the I.L.P.leaders. In November 1903, the secretary of the Scottish Miners Central Association had published a letter in which he said he did not see how trade unionists reconciled the essentially protectionist nature of their unionism with their adherence to free trade.[4] Even I.L.P. leaders were being won over. The chairman of the Willesden Branch asked The Times for

> 'a corner in your columns to enter my individual protest against the indecent manner in which the organised workers of this country are being cajoled and blustered into passing resolutions condemnatory to any fiscal change . . . the so called leaders . . . have been peregrinating through the country . . . asking the working class to condemn a proposal on which we have had as yet no definite pronouncement.' [5]

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1 Not all their arguments, of course, were presented in terms of unemployment alone.

2 W.Hewins to S.Webb, 1 June, 1903. Passfield Papers. Section II, 4b,f 226.

3 L.Maxse to S.Buxton, 26 May, 1903. Buxton Papers. (Uncatalogued).

4 The Times, 17 November, 1903.

5 Ibid., 8 September, 1903.

Protests of this nature had grown to such an extent by the end of 1903 that the T.U.C. issued a statement condemning as blacklegs all who supported Chamberlain. This had little effect, however, for at the L.R.C. conference the following February a member of the Operative Printers Assistants moved a tariff reform resolution.[1] In April 1904 the Trade Union Committee of the Tariff Reform League convened a meeting of trade unionists from London, Stockport, Gateshead, Newcastle, Seaham Harbour, Sunderland and elsewhere, a list which suggests that much preliminary work had been undertaken prior to the actual conference. With the exception of the Flint Glass Makers' delegates, all the men who attended did so as individuals, not as nominees of the unions to which they belonged. Nor were any of them figures of national standing in the labour movement, although the general secretaries of the Paper Makers, the Flint Glass Makers, the Pressed Glass Makers, and the Hosiery Union, were all present. It was not without significance that the glass trade was so well represented, for it had suffered badly from unemployment caused by the increased import of German glass products.[2] After some discussion the conference

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1 L.R.C., Annual Report, 1904, pp 41-2.

2 For example, W.Bradford, a Birmingham glass maker, claimed that although glass production in Birmingham had risen constantly since 1870, unemployment had also gone up. Membership of his union had fallen to 1125, of whom 631 were currently unemployed. This was why, he concluded, the glass workers were supporting Chamberlain. See Birmingham Daily Post, 31 March, 1905.

resolved itself into the Organised Labour Branch of the Tariff Reform League, and F.Hastings Medhurst was elected chairman.[1] Membership was to be confined to bona fide trade unionists, and a two-fold object was laid down - to strengthen the cause of unionism by employing the protective tariff to protect workers against unfair foreign competition, and to advocate the use of preferential tariffs in order to consolidate the British Empire and secure markets for British goods. Both objects would, it was felt, ensure increased employment for British workers. For finance the new organisation was to depend on its chairman and the subscriptions of individual members, although at its meeting in July the executive of the T.R.L. agreed to consider the question of financial aid.[2]

The reaction of the organised workers to the formation of the T.U.T.R.A. was predictably hostile. Pete Curran had already condemned the establishment of the Trade Union Committee even before the April meeting which inaugurated the new organisation, asserting that a workman who supported Chamberlain "displays an innocence of the ways and wiles

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1 It became known eventually as the Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, by which title it will be refered to hereafter (T.U.T.R.A.).

2 This account is based on the reports in The Times, 12 April, 1904: Monthly Notes on Tariff Reform, July 1904, pp 35-7: ibid., August 1904, pp 84-5: ibid., October 1904, pp 175-76. For a full account of the organisation see my article "The Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, 1904-1911", to be published in the Journal of British Studies (May 1970). The date is provisional.

of the manipulators . . .", this being a thinly disguised attack on A.G.Markham, who was the committee's organising secretary and who claimed to be the ex-chief of a London busmens' union.[1] The ironworkers declared that the movement was backed by the same people who had supported the Taff Vale Railway Company and who had favoured Lord Penrhyn in his dispute with his miners, and they stated that they would have nothing to do with it.[2] Fred Maddison circularised all trade unions and local labour parties, accusing the T.U.T.R.A. of trying to create the impression that the rank and file of the labour movement was not behind its leaders in their denunciations of Chamberlain's views. Although acting in his capacity as secretary of the Cobden Club, Maddison was also a trade unionist, and there can be little doubt that he represented the majority opinion.[3]

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1 G.F.T.U., 19th Quarterly Report, January-March 1904, p 7.

2 Ironworkers' Journal, June 1904, p 7.

3 Maddison's circular was printed in ibid., August 1904, p 2. See also Woolwich Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, 24 June, 1904.

Chapter 2. The Year of Action.

The formation of the T.U.T.R.A. coincided with a general rise of interest in unemployment among certain trade unionists, due no doubt to the fact that the unemployed percentage had averaged 6.2 during the first five months of the year.[1] Home trade was slack, particularly in building, and Chamberlain's campaign was doing much to undermine confidence in industry and to discourage investment in industrial equipment. In May the gasworkers stated that many thousands of their members were out of work and that unemployment was the all-important question of the day.[2] In July a member of the A.S.E. wrote that working men could not afford to wait for the millenium when unemployment would be no more, and that experiments must be tried.[3] The general secretary of the enginemen predicted gloomily at the biennial conference that "it will take us all our time to hold our own, in fact we cannot expect to do this . . . ."[4] Interest was naturally rife among building workers. The members of the O.B.S. engaged in a long debate on the possibility of establishing an out of work fund, while

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1 See Table 1.

2 Cited in The Times, 25 May, 1904.

3 A.S.E., Monthly Journal, July 1904, pp 2-3.

4 N.U.E.F.M.& E.W., Biennial Conference Report, April 1904, p 8.

by May, high unemployment had caused the A.S.C.J. to overspend its income by £1600.[1]

Many M.P.'s must have been surprised to find themselves listening to a discussion on unemployment in July, not normally a month noted for it. It had been raised by Will Crooks who wanted to know what instructions had been given to the various state departments responsible for coping with unemployment. Balfour replied shortly that the whole matter was constantly under the surveillance of the government, which remark earned him the sharp censure of the Labour Leader.[2] It would, said the paper, be a great comfort to "the hundreds of thousands of men at present unemployed . . . all anxiety will now be removed, for they have the assurance that neither the demands of the brewers, mine owners, nor landlords ever drive the claims of the unemployed from his mind."[3]

All through the summer months the unemployed percentage never fell below 6.1, except for a slight easing in June, and the columns of the labour press were full of dire warnings.[4] As early as May the Labour Leader referred to the "distant rumbling as of thunder",

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1 O.B.S., Trade Circular and General Reporter, June 1904, pp 8-9: A.S.C.J., Monthly Report, May 1904, p 239.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CXXXVII, 1218-19. 11 July, 1904.

3 Labour Leader, 15 July, 1904.

4 Table 1.

and in July the Mile End Guardians, alarmed by the situation, held a special meeting at which it was suggested that representations be made to the government about the gravity of the position. By September several London poor law unions were making arrangements to increase their casual ward accomodation, and the Salvation Army was reported to be making preparations appropriate to a winter of heavy unemployment. On 26 September a conference of south London guardians, held at Lambeth, discussed whether the government should be asked to take any action. In provincial cities too, local authorities were already discussing what could be done to cope with what promised to be a very severe winter. In Leeds, for example, the city council discussed the question on 4 October, while in Bradford £5000 was set aside for the provision of relief works. October's first week saw 10,000 out of work in Manchester and although the guardians were asked to subsidise the corporation in setting up relief works, the Lord Mayor expressed the view that no solution was possible until the government stepped in.

It was in keeping with the interest shown earlier in the year that the delegates at the September meeting of the T.U.C. showed a lively concern with the worsening situation. Although there were still union officers who claimed that the answer was to make every

worker join a trade union, the conference passed unanimously two resolutions dealing with the question more radically. A member of the cabinet makers moved that all possible pressure be brought to bear on M.P.'s and public bodies in order to secure for local councils the power to acquire land and to set up works for the unemployed. He was followed by Joseph O'Grady, a member of the National Amalgamated Furniture Trades Association, who moved that congress viewed the deterioration in the labour market with concern, and that the parliamentary committee approach the government on the matter of appointing a minister of labour.[1]

The I.L.P. also took action in September, appealing for all branches to make special efforts on behalf of the unemployed. But as usual, the most comprehensive action came from the S.D.F. On 1 October Justice launched an agitation to secure a special session of parliament to deal with unemployment.[2] Local branches were urged to summon public meetings and submit resolutions to the effect that "the question should be taken up at once and dealt with on a national basis . . . the government to summon at once a special Autumn Session of Parliament for the purpose of promoting legislation on behalf of

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1904, pp 89-90.

2 Justice, 1 October, 1904.

the unemployed."[1] S.D.F. members on local bodies were asked to bring this resolution up for discussion and circulars were sent to the metropolitan guardians asking for their support. To provide statistical backing for their case, individual branches were exhorted to carry out a street by street census of the unemployed in all the main industrial centres. For the time being this was the extent of Social Democrat activity. There was no organised campaign of street marches as there had been in previous years. Indeed, the Observer referred to such marches and demonstrations as being run "only in former years."[2] The executive even sent a note round to all the London branches with the information that large scale street demonstrations would not be undertaken until after Christmas, a decision which was regretted by at least one branch.[3] This resolve was due partly to the federation's financial position, which was still somewhat precarious, and partly to the desire to hold demonstrations to have maximum impact on parliament - which did not re-assemble until after Christmas. Also, of course, there were the new regulations to consider and when local members tried to organise a street collection in Edmonton they were promptly arrested and fined for not having the

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1 Justice, 15 October, 1904.

2 Observer, 16 October, 1904.

3 See Hackney Branch S.D.F., Minutes, 25 November, 1904.

necessary permit. Thus although there was agitation it was not centrally directed, at least as far as street demonstrations were concerned. What generally seems to have happened is that where the unemployed were active, local S.D.F. agitators tried to gain some degree of control. In Manchester, for example, the Social Democrats secured representation on the local unemployed committee, which had been operating for some time, and gradually assumed control of its activities.

On 6 October Walter Long announced that he had received many representations about the state of employment. "From these communications", he said, "it is evident that there exists considerable apprehension."[1] Although he declared himself to be unworried he felt that some advantage might accrue if a conference of metropolitan guardians was held. W.F.Black in the Labour Leader found in this announcement a "faint glimmer of hope", but did not expect anything of a very practical nature to result because of the type of men who would be present, and also because of Long's own character.[2] The S.D.F. felt that the meeting was being arranged merely to draw attention away from their demand for an autumn session of parliament, and in order to prevent this from happening the executive committee immediately drafted a letter which was sent not only to

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1 National Union Gleanings, XXIII (1904), p 262.

2 Labour Leader, 14 October, 1904.

Long himself, but also to all the London boards of guardians, enclosing a list of proposals for dealing with unemployment first compiled twenty years ago but, said the letter, just as relevant today. It pointed out that the unemployed problem was a national one and as such, required treatment on a national scale, and it concluded by asking each board to press Long for the special session.[1] This was backed by Justice which appealed for all members of local bodies to stress the need for parliamentary action as there was "better prospect than ever before of working up the authorities to a sense of their responsibility in regard to the unemployed. . . and it is our duty to see that we bring the requisite pressure to bear upon them."[2] To emphasise the point the paper carried a large headline, something it did not normally have, which read, "We demand an Autumn Session of Parliament to Deal with the Unemployed."[3] The guardians of London did not respond very favourably to the S.D.F. appeal, however. Only Hackney, Shoreditch, Camberwell, Poplar and Wandsworth passed the resolution, while Lambeth agreed to pass it on to its delegates at the conference called by Long. At this meeting George Lansbury was heavily defeated when he attempted to secure the passage of the Social Democrat resolution, probably because the delegates were

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1 The letter was printed in Justice, 15 October, 1904.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

satisfied by Long's promise of action. It is worth noting that the federation later sent the letter to all local authorities, and on 19 November Justice claimed that it had been acknowledged by 89 unions and agreed to by a further 45; acknowledged by 13 local councils and agreed to by a further 12; acknowledged by 19 urban district councils and agreed to by a further 40. For rural councils the figures were respectively 10 and 3.[1]

Long's conference assembled on 14 October and he went to some lengths to assure the delegates that he did not share the view, current in some circles, that the country was facing an imminent and grave crisis. He wanted, he continued, to lay the foundations of a scheme for dealing with the unemployed in a more systematic manner than ever before. Dealing first with suggestions which had been made to him, Long said that he could not give any consideration at all to the idea that the government should provide a large sum of money to finance national works. The unification of the London boroughs for the purpose of establishing farm colonies was an idea which might be effected, but it would require legislation and thus could not be implemented this year. Nor, he added, when Lansbury tried to carry

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1 Justice, 19 November, 1904.

his S.D.F. resolution, would he consider a special parliamentary session as he did not think that it would achieve anything. For immediate consideration, however, he proposed that farm colony districts be set up for London; that in each district local committees be formed of representatives of guardians, councils, charity groups, and churches, to sort out who should be given work and who should be dealt with under the poor law. Over these distress committees was to be a central committee similar to the Mansion House Committee and elected by the local bodies. The Local Government Board, said Long, would assist the work of all the committees by sanctioning such administrative expenses as were incurred and paying them out of the common poor fund. The borough councils could make contributions to the central fund if they wished, and if they considered such contributions to be ultra vires he would sanction these payments by use of his powers under an act of 1887.

Reaction to this statement was mixed. The Graphic and the Mail both thought that Long had performed well in resisting a state grant for the unemployed.[1] The Gazette welcomed his plan as the first step towards the co-operation between national and local authorities which was a precondition of any successful solution.[2] The Observer approved ...

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1 Daily Graphic, 15 October, 1904: Daily Mail, 15 October, 1904.

2 Westminster Gazette, 15 October, 1904.

of what it termed Long's "salutary advice" to local authorities which had been too much influenced by socialist agitators.[1] The C.O.S., whose inclusion on the committees was suggested by Long at another conference at Islington and greeted with cries of "no" and "we won't have them", felt rather that he had "capitulated to the socialist agitation, and has undertaken to facilitate the creation of public work by a public authority . . . a most impolitic step."[2]

But in spite of this alleged capitulation the socialists generally showed little enthusiasm for Long's plans. Hardie, as so often in his career, was almost alone in welcoming the scheme, stating that at last there was a promise of government action.[3] As late as January 1905 he referred to it as a "hopeful and helpful development."[4] Justice on the other hand, said that the conference had been a hollow farce designed to draw public attention away from the S.D.F. demand for an autumn session of parliament by providing a semblance of action from the central authorities. Everyone was exhorted to keep up the pressure by deputation, resolution, memorial, and leaflet. All other work, it pronounced, must be laid aside.[5] On the extreme left the S.P.G.B. condemned the proposals out of hand. "Send your victims to

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1 Observer, 16 October, 1904.

2 Charity Organisation Review, XVI (November 1904), p 268. The meeting at Islington was reported in Daily Graphic, 18 October, 1904.

3 In an interview with the Labour Leader, 21 October, 1904.

4 J.K.Hardie, "Dealing with the unemployed; a hint from the past", Nineteenth Century, LVII (January 1905), p 50.

5 Justice, 22 October, 1904.

labour colonies, place over them some hardened task masters, credit them with 6d per day, give them plenty of sermons and prayers, and all will be well."[1]

Some of the criticism, however, was less polemic and more practical. That London was not to be united for the purpose of creating farm colonies led Crooks to write to Balfour in December claiming that "all poor parts, where work-people are aggregated, have to bear abnormal burdens which should be shared, if not by the nation, then at least by the metropolis."[2] Closely allied with this criticism was the fact that West Ham, one of the worst affected areas, was excluded because it was not a London borough. S.D.F. speakers made much of this at the L.T.C. demonstration held in Trafalgar Square on 18 December. In the Social Democrat one writer claimed that the whole scheme would fail because the local councils would not sanction the levying of a rate or grant.[3] At the first meeting of the central committee labour representatives, led by Grinling of the S.D.F., opposed the resolution that money be raised from voluntary subscriptions instead of from the rates, but they were easily beaten. This voluntary principle annoyed the socialists so much that Hyndman had the effrontery to claim at a public meeting chaired by the Lord

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1 Socialist Standard, 5 November, 1904.

2 Quoted in Haw, Will Crooks, pp 239-40.

3 Social Democrat, VIII (November 1904), pp 646-49.

Mayor of London, who was also the committee's treasurer, that Long's plan was like that of General Trochu at the siege of Paris - it was not designed to work.[1] The other main criticism was directed against the whole concept of a committee to tackle the problem, and the L.T.C. passed a resolution on these lines. Blatchford attacked the idea of a committee because it was a slow machine, Quelch because its composition was, in his view, mainly bourgeois.[2]

If Long had hoped to ally the unrest and to relieve the pressure of the unemployed by his plan then his hopes were ill-founded. In fact, as the situation continued to deteriorate the labour movements began to organise their efforts even more. At a meeting of the N.A.C. held at the end of October the I.L.P. decided to hold a series of meetings on unemployment in several leading cities, the places chosen being Sheffield, Manchester, London, Cardiff, Aberdeen, Leith, Bradford, Birmingham, Middlesbrough, Glasgow, West Ham, and Woolwich.[3] The S.D.F., meanwhile, had decided to proceed with the campaign to secure an autumn session of parliament and after Long's conference sent a telegramme to Balfour congratulating him that at last the government had taken some action, which was an improvement on their inactivity of previous years. As some of the ideas which Long had mentioned required

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1 Morning Post, 20 December, 1904.

2 Blatchford in the Clarion, 2 December, 1904: Quelch in the Social Democrat, IX (December 1904), p 720.

3 I.L.P., N.A.C.Minutes, 31 October, 1904.

legislative orders, the S.D.F. asked Balfour to recall parliament claiming that if special sessions were justified to start wars then they were surely justified for the sake of the unemployed.[1] This was backed by an appeal to all local branches to communicate with the government and with local M.P.'s seeking their support for an autumn session. Only three branches are recorded, however, as having acted on this suggestion. Bradford was the first to receive a reply from Balfour referring them to Long's statement of October which, said the Prime Minister, was an accurate presentation of the government's views.[2] The only other branches which received replies were Chorley and Rawtenstall.[3] Nine M.P.'s replied to various branches who contacted them.[4]

But despite this poor response fourteen M.P.'s signed a petition sent by Hardie to Balfour, also in favour of an autumn session, an idea which labour now seems to have taken up with some vigour. Most of them were labour or trade union members although the Liberal, Macnamara, and the Irish Nationalist, Nannetti, also signed it.[5]

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1 Justice, 29 October, 1904.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 5 November, 1904: ibid., 3 December, 1904.

4 Ibid., 5 November, 1904: ibid., 19 November, 1904: ibid., 3 December, 1904.

5 Labour Leader, 28 October, 1904.

Support for this move came also from the T.U.C. in response to a request from O'Grady that the parliamentary committee act upon the resolution passed at congress. Accordingly a letter was drafted and despatched to Balfour.

> 'That this meeting of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, representing 1,500,000 workers, learns with pleasure that an appeal has been made by a number of Labour and other members of Parliament and Local Authorities urging the Prime Minister to call a special short Session of Parliament for the purpose of dealing with the unemployed question, and joins with them in pressing the matter on the Prime Minister's favourable attention.' [1]

Balfour replied to all these requests in a similar vein, saying to Hardie that "if I thought that an autumn Session of Parliament would contribute . . . I should be prepared to accept the suggestion of the Labour M.P.'s in favour of a special Session being held . . . ."[2] In a letter to Crooks he gave his reasons for refusing the special session, stating firstly that they ought to await the outcome of the new machinery which Long had created, and that, secondly, they should avoid placing exaggerated hopes on the outcome of a public debate.[3] It is perhaps worth noting that the S.P.G.B., which had at

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1 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 24 October, 1904.

2 Quoted in National Union Gleanings, XXIII (1904), p 268.

3 Quoted in Haw, Will Crooks, pp 238-39.

least fifteen London branches, mainly in areas of S.D.F. strength, was also against the idea of an autumn session because it encouraged the workers to think that "the unemployed problem may find its solution by trusting to parliaments composed of members of the middle class."[1]

In face of the government's resolution labour tactics seem to have changed slightly on all fronts. The S.D.F. had already shifted the emphasis of its campaign towards getting the present session of parliament extended (the practical effect of which would have been exactly the same as having a special session, despite the change in phraseology), although only three borough councils bothered to reply to the letter in which this was announced. When the T.U.C. learned of Balfour's refusal to consider the idea of a special session, a second letter was forwarded to him by the parliamentary committee regretting that "you could not see your way to arrange an autumn session to consider this question", and adding that the matter was now sufficiently urgent to warrant them "in respectfully asking if you would be so kind as to make arrangements for calling the attention of parliament to the subject immediately at the commencement of the approaching session."[2] The T.U.C. also asked Balfour if he would receive a deputation from

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1 Socialist Standard, 1 April, 1905.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905, pp 60-1.

them. In order that it should be able to present him with some concrete proposals it was decided to hold joint consultations with the General Federation of Trade Unions.[1] This resulted in the compilation of a comprehensive report on unemployment, and the decision to hold a joint labour conference on the subject early in the new year.[2]

Balfour prevaricated about the T.U.C.'s request for a deputation but eventually told his secretary that "I see a certain difficulty in refusing. . .", and decided that to see it in the first week of February would give him a chance to say things which he would have to say anyway in the King's Speech.[3] Early in January Sam Woods, secretary of the T.U.C., was summoned to Downing Street. In the event he was ill and W.C.Steadman went instead, returning with a promise to receive a deputation on 7 February.

Yet a further shift in the direction of labour aims away from the idea of a special session towards that of acting in the coming session of 1905 is seen in the fact that J. Walker informed the Labour Leader that Hardie was considering the introduction of an unemployment bill in the new session.[4] This bill, said Walker, was to be based on

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1 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 16 November, 1904.

2 Infancy of the Labour Party, I, p 272. 2 December, 1904.

3 A.J.Balfour to J.Sandars, 4 January, 1905. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add. MSS 49763, f 14.

4 Labour Leader, 30 December, 1904.

Hardie's recent pamphlet, The unemployed problem (London, 1904), and he suggested that each I.L.P. member of a public body provide each of his colleagues with a copy. Certainly the suggestions in the pamphlet were sufficiently mild to have a fairly wide appeal, for they included schemes of afforestation, an eight hour day for corporation employees, the return of men to the land, and even provided for an extension of Long's system of committees. On the other hand there is no record of any such bill in the N.A.C. Minutes, so Hardie was either acting as an individual or as the spokesman of the N.U.C. Although this latter theory seems feasible in the light of Hardie's work earlier in the year, the N.U.C. had apparently collapsed by the middle of 1904.

Meanwhile, the S.D.F. had been somewhat disconcerted by the way its demand for an autumn session had been so readily taken up by other labour groups. At the annual conference in the spring of 1905 the executive report said that the S.D.F. - as usual - had received little "recognition for its initiative in this direction."[1] Nor did the federation care for the way in which the leadership of the unemployed movement seemed to have passed out of its control, for in issuing its annual Christmas appeal the I.L.P. had claimed that "we are now in the

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1 S.D.F., Annual Report, 1905, p 17.

midst of the unemployed tragedy, and upon the I.L.P. devolves the chief responsibility for leading and guiding the agitation."[1] It must have been galling for Social Democrats to read of MacDonald's assertion that the forthcoming L.R.C. unemployment conference would lay down the party's official policy and that for the first time "proposals would be pushed to the front by a permanent and active political organisation."[2] Some Social Democrats did not really agree with many of the ideas put forward by the I.L.P. The ideas of afforestation, foreshore reclamation, land cultivation, and of a peasant proprietary, all of which figured in Hardie's pamphlet and also in the joint T.U.C.-G.F.T.U. report to be discussed at the joint conference, were all attacked by one writer in Justice. It was, added this writer, a thousand pities that Hardie had committed himself to such reactionary ideas.[3] The Labour Leader was not insensitive to these criticisms and hit back strongly. It accused the federation of trying to organise its own rival unemployment conference and later, in December, attacked the L.T.C. unemployed demonstration held in Trafalgar Square at which S.D.F. speakers figured prominently, saying that it was holding the unemployed up to public ridicule to organise

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1 I.L.P., Head Office Circulars (Unbound), December 1904.

2 The Times, 24 December, 1904. The original of this press statement, issued by MacDonald, is in L.R.C., Letter Files, Vol 18, f 223. December 1904.

3 Justice, 17 December, 1904.

a meeting which attracted less people than an anti-vaccination rally.[1]

One result of the pressure applied on the government by the working class organisations was that Long showed himself willing to consult with their leaders. For example, he invited representatives of the T.U.C. and the G.F.T.U. to be present at the inaugural meeting of the central committee on 25 November.[2] Even the L.R.C. came in for his attentions, for a letter was read at the executive meeting on 2 December, in which he explained the working of the central committee, and it was resolved to send representatives to meet him to talk the matter over.[3] In spite of this willingness agitation continued to grow, and even the most superficial survey of the daily press in the days before Christmas shows the pressure building up in all centres of industrial activity. In Bradford, Norwich, and Manchester, for exanple, the unemployed, led by socialist agitators, threatened to swamp the local workhouses if work was not found for them. Local authorities were forced to take action in a large number of towns and London boroughs, of which the following are only a selection:- Leeds, Whitehaven, Liverpool, Leicester, Bristol, Nottingham, Birmingham, Burnley, Bromley, Newcastle, Brighton, Tipton, Dublin, Norwich, Aston,

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1 Labour Leader, 25 December, 1904.

2 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 16 November, 1904.

3 Infancy of the Labour Party, I, p 272. 2 December, 1904.

Kettering, Belfast, Northampton, Camberwell, Battersea, Poplar, Clapham, Walthamstow, and Bethnal Green. The action taken varied from city to city. In Bristol the lord mayor, having heard a deputation from the local trades council, agreed to find work for the unemployed. In Liverpool the council's declaration that work was plentiful provoked a mass parade of unemployed workers through the city centre. A labour registry was opened in Brighton, while in Belfast the guardians themselves led a deputation to the President of the Irish Local Government Board. In Aston a relief fund was opened.

At the end of November the unemployed index stood at 7.0%, its highest figure for the whole century. By the end of the following month it had climbed another 0.6% and fears were expressed that violence would soon erupt.[1] These fears were heightened by London's first major demonstration of the winter on 18 December. Although it was organised by the L.T.C. the speakers were mainly from the S.D.F., and included Jack Williams, one of the heroes of the west end riots in 1886 and 1887. The Graphic observed that some of the "addresses were very violent in tone."[2] The Daily Mail thought that they had been an open incitement to crime.[3] Harry Quelch's view was that there

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1 Table 1.

2 Daily Graphic, 19 December, 1904.

3 Daily Mail, 19 December, 1904.

were limits to human endurance and that if the propertied classes ever had reason to regret the government's lack of action "the responsibility will rest with those who refused, and not with those who demanded legislative action."[1]

In fact, the government was already considering legislative action in the forthcoming session of parliament. The Board of Trade had already written to the executive of the N.A.U.L. asking for permission to apply to branch secretaries for information about the state of trade in the unskilled industries.[2] The growth of violent agitation and the persistence of organised labour were at last beginning to tell, and Long summed up later how he felt in the last weeks of 1904.

> 'It is all forgotten now, but during the eighteen months that the pressure of the unemployed was growing, the methods adopted by the unemployed towards all the authorities were violent in the extreme. There were crowds besieging the offices of the relieving officers . . . the boards of guardians could hardly sit in some places without safeguarding their doors . . . .' [3]

Among the reasons which Long gave to the poor law commissioners for his decision to legislate were the facts that the authorities were constantly calling his attention to the plight of the unemployed in their areas, and their agitation; that charitable effort was being

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1 Justice, 24 December, 1904.

2 N.A.U.L., E.C.Minutes, 9 December, 1904.

3 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, Appendix VIII. (Cd. 5066). British Parliamentary Papers, 1910, XLVIII, p 69.

wasted; that local municipal works were proving inefficient and extravagant; and that the colonies were objecting to British paupers being sent to them in large numbers. He added that there was no method of ascertaining the state of employment at a given time and that therfore some central body was necessary. To some extent all of these factors had been operative for many years - except the pressure of the unemployed, and it is significant that Long, in admitting that his plan was imperfect, stated that it "was somewhat hurriedly conceived."[1] On 24 January the measure which Long wished to introduced was discussed by the cabinet.[2]

The government was not alone in being compelled by the weight of unemployed agitation to think out a policy. The Liberals, too, who were frequently castigated in the labour press for supporting a free trade status quo which could produce such suffering, were also beginning to interest themselves in the matter. The inspiration behind this was Herbert Gladstone, who had written to Campbell Bannerman in November suggesting that the party should form one or two unofficial committees to investigate various aspects of social policy.[3] By December these committees had begun work and a memorandum on

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1 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, Appendix VIII. (Cd. 5066). British Parliamentary Papers, 1910, XLVIII, p 78.

2 The Unemployed. PRO.CAB. 37/74. 24 January, 1905.

3 H.Gladstone to H.Campbell Bannerman, 14 November, 1904. Campbell Bannerman Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 41217, ff 134-35.

unemployment, compiled by Gladstone, was circulating among leading Liberals. No copy survives but its importance may be gauged from the fact that it was seen by Campbell Bannerman, Asquith, Bryce, Morley, Tweedmouth, Spencer, Fowler, and Sinclair. Gladstone explained some of his ideas in a speech made at Leeds on 5 December, notably that the government should take a survey of what national works needed doing, and then get on with them.[1] All this was far too radical for Bryce who thought the whole matter should be treated with caution "lest we should seem to admit that it is the duty of the State to provide work - a doctrine which would cause general alarm."[2]

Another indication of Liberal interest in the problem can be seen in the fact that early in the new year Sidney Buxton led an all party deputation to see Long. This deputation, which consisted of east end M.P.'s, urged on the government the necessity of making the provisional central committee a statutory one, and also of extending the scheme of October to the rest of the country. It is worth noting that Long's legislative plans, which included the levying of a rate on the boroughs must have been fairly well known in labour circles before they were actually made public. For one thing, Will

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1 The Times, 6 December, 1904.

2 J.Bryce to H.Gladstone, 14 December, 1904. Gladstone Papers. B.M.Add. MSS 46019, f 84.

Crooks was a member of Buxton's deputation, and secondly, Buxton wrote and told George Lansbury of Long's plans, although he did stress that they were still subject to approval.[1]

There were, of course, the usual attempts made in this period of high unemployment to win the support of working men for protection. Earlier in the year the fear of unemployment had been used to whip up support for the Aliens Bill, although it had met with little success. Only the miners had been inclined to favour the measure, and then only because they were afraid of the dangers involved in employing non-English speaking miners underground, not because they feared for their jobs. Justice accused the bill's supporters of resorting to "contemptible lying."[2] But as late as December the Daily Mail was still claiming that the "Main cause of this present distress is the steady and uninterupted flow of pauper, diseased and criminal foreigners."[3]

More significant from the point of view of organised labour, however, were the efforts made by the tariff reformers to win support, using the bait of increased employment. As the Liberal Magazine stated in December, "one of the trump cards of the Protectionists is

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1 S.Buxton to G.Lansbury, 19 January, 1905. Lansbury Papers. Section I, Vol 2, ff 95-9.

2 Justice, 2 July, 1904.

3 Daily Mail, 17 December, 1904.

the bribe that with a scientific tariff there will be no unemployment."[1] Sir Philip Muntz, one of Chamberlain's supporters, even said that "he was not sorry trade was depressed and employment scarce, because it would assist Mr. Chamberlain."[2] There were few signs that labour was being converted on any large scale, however. The N.F.L.A. re-affirmed its traditional protectionist allegiance at its annual conference in October.[3] The T.U.T.R.A. had launched a recruiting drive in the last months of the year, and although it met with some small success in London, it did not warrant the extravagant claims of the Sun that it was making headway all over the country.[4] When the association's first annual conference assembled in April 1905 only 58 delegates were present, 11 from the building unions (unemployed percentage 11.2 in December 1904), and 13 each from the engineering and glass unions (unemployed percentage in engineering in December was 8.3).[5]

(ii)

All through the Christmas period the agitation continued and at the end of the year the unemployed index stood at 7.6%. In individual

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1 Liberal Magazine, XII (December 1904), p 692.

2 Rugby Advertiser, 3 December, 1904.

3 The Times, 26 October, 1904.

4 Sun, 27 February, 1905.

5 Table 1. No separate figures were issued for the glass industry but see W.Bradford's letter quoted on p 74.

trades it was considerably higher. The builders, for example, had 11.2% out of work.[1] Small wonder that the president of the Manchester Unity Operative Bricklayers said at Bolton on 21 January that unemployment would never be solved while the workers were content to be dominated by a capitalist parliament.[2] Among the branches of the A.S.C.J., a resolution from Fulham No 2 branch in favour of a reduction of hours won unanimous support from at least another seven important branches.[3] In the furniture trades the unemployed index had reached 13.5% by January, and at the monthly meeting of the L.T.C. a member of the French Polishers Society moved that union unemployment funds should be subsidised from the Mansion House Fund.[4] He was opposed by Mary Macarthur who said that this was tantamount to charity, although a subsidy from the state would be a different matter.[5] An interesting variation on this theme was provided by Hardie who suggested that the unions' funds should be supplemented from the rates in order to support the burden of unemployment.[6]

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1 Table 1.

2 M.U.O.B., Monthly Trade Report, February 1905, p 15.

3 A.S.C.J., Monthly Report, February 1905, p 119: ibid., March 1905, p 166

4 Table 1.

5 Trades and Labour Gazette, February 1905, p 4.

6 In the A.S.E., Monthly Journal, January 1905, pp 6-9.

As yet, however, these ideas were confined to the realm of discussion, and the agitation for immediate action by the authorities continued in the streets and the meeting halls continued. The I.L.P. campaign of mass meetings was extended to cover new areas. More direct action action by I.L.P. branches led to confrontations with local councils in Cardiff and Glasgow. In Gloucester the lord mayor was pursuaded to take action by the trades council. Meanwhile, the L.R.C. plans for a national conference went ahead and it met in Liverpool on the eve of the L.R.C.'s annual meeting. That it was an inherently more radical meeting that the 1903 equivalent was shown when the first resolution was put, stating that unemployment was caused by monopoly, the burdens imposed on the workers by non-productive parasites, and the lack of industrial organisation. Further resolutions were carried dealing with the need for reforms in the administration of the poor law, local authority works, the control of government works, a ministry of labour, and the granting of purchasing powers to local authorities.[1]

In some ways this conference was a turning point for the L.R.C. Hitherto, the T.U.C., despite the efforts of the S.D.F. and the I.L.P., had claimed to be the only legitimate representative of the working

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1 L.R.C., Annual Report, 1905, pp 61-8.

classes in negotiating with the government over unemployment, the chairman, James Sexton, telling MacDonald that unemployment "was not a direct function of your committee."[1] After the conference, however, Sexton apparently changed his mind and told MacDonald that the L.R.C. should be represented on the deputation which was to wait on the Prime Minister in February and, in fact, the conference resolutions were the substance of the deputees' case.[2] Balfour received them coldly, however. He was, he said, against nationalisation. Coastal works he dismissed as mere palliatives, and he was doubtful whether afforestation would pay. Although he accepted the need for national machinery, he added that the problem of distinguishing between loafers and the genuine unemployed was a formidable one. "We do not feel", he concluded, "that we can, on that line, with safety to the best interests of the community, make our experiments in the future."[3]

One result of Balfour's attitude towards this deputation was that extra weight was given to labour arguments about the need to increase independent working class representation in the house of commons. Pete Curran had already stated that the deputation had not really expected

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1 J.Sexton to J.R.MacDonald, 12 December, 1904. L.R.C., Letter Files, Vol 18, f 126, ii.

2 J.Sexton to J.R.MacDonald, 2 February, 1905. Ibid., Vol 20, f 227.

3 Report of a deputation . . . on unemployment, p 14. In T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905.

very much, but he hoped that Balfour's attitude would activate working men as to the necessity of "sending the proper kind of people to formulate legislation . . . . "[1] Barnes said that labour forces needed to be marshalled inside the house of commons in order to get anything done for the unemployed.[2] This was repeated somewhat forcibly by the secretary of the Manchester bricklers and also in the Typographical Circular.[3] The G.F.T.U. report later said that the deputation had played a significant role in rousing the government to action, but in view of Balfour's coldness, and the fact that legislation was already being considered by Long, the claim would seem to be ill-founded.[4]

The comment of Justice on the deputation was that its failure to secure any government action made it all the more imperative that their Trafalgar Square demonstration be successful because this method of action was now the only one likely to get any response from the government.[5] The decision to organise this demonstration had been taken at a meeting of the London members on 5 January and it had a

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1 N.U.G.W.& G.L., Quarterly Balance Sheet, December 1904, p 7.

2 A.S.E., Monthly Journal, March 1905, p 8.

3 M.U.O.B., Monthly Trade Report, March 1905, p 20: Typographical Circular, March 1905, p 16.

4 G.F.T.U., Annual Report, 1905, p 8.

5 Justice, 11 February, 1905.

dual purpose - to advertise the plight of the unemployed, and to appoint a deputation to attend at the bar of the house of commons in order to demand a national solution. The main meeting was to be in London but the provincial branches were urged to organise local meetings on the same day and to send telegrams of support to London. Finance was a problem, and in order to raise funds collecting cards were distributed to all branches and members pressed to collect as widely as possible. Williams and Salmon were appointed as organisers to plan local preliminary meetings in London to publicise the main demonstration and to whip up support for it. By the first week of February, however, only seven provincial meetings had been arranged.[1]

On 11 February Trafalgar Square was the scene of the London demonstration and although Justice claimed that between 4000-5000 men took part, the Labour Leader was more circumspect, putting the number at between 2000-3000.[2] Williams announced that no answer had been received from the government to their request for permission to appear before the bar of the house, but they were relying on a statute of Charles II's reign which said that deputations of ten could always attend at the bar. Quelch, Williams, R.Smith, Smillie, Foster, Hayday,

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1 Justice, 4 February, 1905.

2 Ibid., 18 February, 1905: Labour Leader, 17 February, 1905.

Salmon, J.Macdonald, and W.C.Steadman were duly appointed to attend on 14 February. Eighteen support meetings were eventually held in the provinces but the press ignored them all. When the deputation arrived at the house of commons Balfour refused to see it, saying that only M.P.'s could present petitions at the bar.

On the same day that the S.D.F. deputation was turned away M.P.'s heard in the King's Speech that authorities would be established to deal with the unemployed. This announcement, however, evoked little more than passing comment from most speakers.[1] Nor for that matter did the press attach much significance to it. Most of the daily papers selected the projected Aliens Bill or the Redistribution Bill as the most important domestic matters mentioned. The Daily News only mentioned the Unemployment Bill in order to dismiss it as a piece of bluff which would fool no-one.[2] This was also the view of the Railway Review, whose editor said it was merely an electioneering squib.[3] Others, however, were pleased with the announcement. Hardie welcomed it as "the first break in the policy of do nothingness", but he would make no detailed comment until the exact terms of the measure

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1 For the debate see Hansard, 4th Series, CXLI, 4-168. 14 February, 1905.

2 Daily News, 15 February, 1905.

3 Railway Review, 17 February, 1905.

were known.[1] Arthur Henderson thought it "most gratifying that at last the question of unemployment finds a place in the King's Speech."[2] The I.L.P. decided that for the time being no more copies of Hardie's pamphlet should be published, while the immediate reaction of the L.R.C. was to call a meeting of the executive to prepare and issue a statement on the proposed bill. Only the S.D.F. decided to keep up its agitation, declaring that the announcement of a bill was a tribute to their pressure which must now be maintained to prevent the government from weakening. A circular was issued to the "Unemployed of London", stating that the S.D.F. deputation had been refused a hearing at the bar of the house of commons but that a further meeting was to be held on 25 February to consider future action.[3]

The fears expressed by the editor of the Railway Review that the bill was merely an election gambit were largely unfounded. It is true that Sandars had written to Balfour about the contents of the Royal Speech, saying that it "ought to be made as attractive as possible for Party reasons" as "it may be our goodbye", but this is not to say that the government never had any intention of introducing the measure, as

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1 Labour Leader, 17 February, 1905.

2 F.S.I., Ironfounders' Monthly Report, April 1905, p 13.

3 Justice, 25 February, 1905.

was alleged when it was so long in making an appearance in the house of commons.[1] Indeed, it was discussed again by the cabinet only three days after the King's Speech was made. The memorandum which Long presented to the cabinet on this occasion dealt at length with the controversial proposal to raise money from the rates for the new scheme. The main purpose, he said, apart from the need to provide some means of meeting distress before it actually occurred, was to offset the growth of the demand for state action to solve the problem. This demand was quite popular with certain sections of the opposition (and also, of course, with many working men), and he feared that if his new plan failed for want of funds - as was likely if it was denied rate aid - this demand would grow in intensity.[2]

But the suggestion to utilise the rates caused a lot of heart searching among Conservatives, which helps to explain why it was so long before the measure was presented to the commons. Balfour himself had already expressed grave doubts over one of Long's ideas, that of giving facilities to local councils to borrow money from the government in order to finance relief works, calling it a "very novel departure."[3] The main opposition to the present suggestion, however,

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1 J.Sandars to A.J.Balfour, 21 January, 1905. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add. MSS 49763, f 73.

2 The Unemployed. PRO. CAB. 37/74. 17 February, 1905.

3 A.J.Balfour to W.Long, 23 December, 1904. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add. MSS 49776, f 40.

came from Lord Salisbury, who presented a counter-memorandum to the cabinet on 2 March, arguing against rate aid because "it involves principles so novel that they ought only to be adopted upon the most conclusive evidence."[1] His main fear was that once the principle had been conceded there was nothing to prevent a future government greatly increasing the rate contribution, which would encourage the workers to depend on the community rather than on their own efforts. There was, he felt, no satisfactory safeguard against malingerers, and if rate aid was sanctioned, voluntary subscriptions would soon dry up. Finally, he said, the present distress was nearly over and therefore the need for emergency measures had disappeared.[2] The outcome of this cabinet meeting was apparently a slightly modified bill, for Salisbury was soon writing to Balfour that "though the new Unemployed Bill is an improvement upon the first draft, I do not approve of it. I think there should be no direct access to the rates . . . for the purpose of providing work for the unemployed."[3] He had no objection, however, to the rate money being used to provide machinery or to finance emigration, and stated that he would not oppose the bill or press his views if Balfour and the rest of the cabinet disagreed with him.

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1 The Unemployed. PRO. CAB. 37/75. 2 March, 1905.

2 Ibid.

3 Lord Salisbury to A.J.Balfour, 5 March, 1905. Balfour Papers. B.M. Add.MSS 49758, ff 11-12.

The other main source of opposition to the idea of rate aid being used to provide work for the unemployed lay in powerful vested interests outside the cabinet. One of these was the C.O.S., which saw the plan as a concession to socialist demands. One of the society's leading figures, Sir Arthur Clay, said in March that "one of the most active agents in bringing both direct and indirect pressure to bear upon the government, is the Social Democratic Federation, of whose operations . . . the general public is hardly conscious."[1] The other vested interest comprised the wealthy London boroughs which resented the prospect of being rated in order to subsidise the operations on behalf of the unemployed concentrated in the poorer boroughs. Sidney Buxton aptly summed up Long's problem when he wrote that "his difficulty is with his own friends, and the richer Metropolitan Boroughs, who do not want to be rated."[2]

Although the Labour M.P.'s seem to have been satisfied by the government's promise of action, the S.D.F. kept up its programme of demonstrations. There had been a joint meeting between the S.D.F. deputation and the Labour M.P.'s after the abortive attempt to gain a hearing at the bar of the house, but Burns noted in his diary that

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1 Quoted in Justice, 25 March, 1905.

2 S.Buxton to H.Campbell Bannerman, 16 January, 1905. Campbell Bannerman Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 41238, f 8.

underneath the apparent unity there lay "fanatical discord."[1] The Labour M.P.'s were heavily criticised at the S.D.F. demonstration on the embankment on 25 February for failing to raise the question in the house of commons. In an impassioned speech F.G.Jones declared that they had "forgotten the interests of the class which gave them birth and which they were sent to the House of Commons to represent."[2] This accusation was supported by an editorial in Justice which said that with 11 or 12 labour men in the house it was a shame that such demonstrations were still necessary.[3] But the demonstrations were costing a lot of money and the same issue of Justice carried an appeal for all comrades to raise more funds, a request which was repeated the following week.

Perhaps the taunts of the Social Democrats, combined with the government's slowness in introducing the measure, stung the Labour M.P.'s, for on 6 March Hardie asked when the promised Unemployment Bill was to be brought in. Balfour replied, understandably in view of his party's internal divisions over the bill, that although it would not be long he could give no precise date.[4] A fortnight went by, during which time Walter Long was transferred to the Irish Office and replaced

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1 Burns Diaries, 14 February, 1905. B.M.Add.MSS 46323.

2 Justice, 4 March, 1905.

3 Ibid.

4 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXII, 430. 6 March, 1905.

by the Prime Minister's brother, Gerald, but there was still no sign of the bill, and the S.D.F. began to lay plans for another monster demonstration in Trafalgar Square. In the meantime a letter was sent to Balfour drawing his attention to the cessation of work by the central unemployed committee due to lack of funds, a fact which, said the letter, illustrated the need for haste with the projected measure.[1] At the end of March the federation decided to hold five weekly meetings to foster the unrest in the capital. Letters appealing to the various London boroughs to keep up the pressure on the government were also distributed, but the fact that only six bothered to reply suggests that the local authorities were also waiting for the bill.

On 30 March the patience of the Labour M.P.'s finally ran out and questions were thrown at Balfour with such vigour that the Speaker twice had to call for order.[2] Three days later came the crowning farce. Hardie asked if it was the government's intention to introduce the bill before Easter under the ten minute rule as Balfour had previously hinted.

> 'Balfour: "If the course suggested by the hon. Gentleman is one that meets with general approval I shall be happy to accept it."
> Hardie: "In that event on what day will it be introduced?"
> Balfour: "I cannot name a day, nor can I venture to say that so important a Bill ought to be introduced under the ten minute rule." '[3]

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1 Justice, 25 March, 1905.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CXLIII, 1735. 30 March, 1905.

3 Ibid., CXLIV, 147. 3 April, 1905.

But discretion evidently got the better of Balfour's valour, for on 8 April he informed the S.D.F. that the bill would be introduced under the ten minute rule before Easter, along with the Aliens Bill.[1] It is interesting to note the differing reactions of the federation and the other labour groups. The parliamentary correspondent of the Labour Leader wrote that "there are good reasons for believing that the Government's Unemployed Bill will be of a satisfactory character", while A.A.Watts of the S.D.F. said that it would be intrinsically useless as it would put the burden on the local authority and not the national exchequer.[2] Other S.D.F. members, such as Will Thorne, apparently shared this view.[3] On 18 April Gerald Balfour rose to introduce the promised bill and the unemployed agitation of 1904-1905 entered its third and most momentous phase.

(iii)

It is tempting to interpret Long's removal to the Irish Office as a Balfourian ploy to remove him from an office in which his radicalism had caused internal dissesion in the Conservative Party, but the main consideration behind Balfour's choice was the need to find an experienced Tory squire - which Long typified - to satisfy the demands

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1 In a letter printed in Justice, 15 April, 1905.

2 Labour Leader, 7 April, 1905: Justice, 15 April, 1905.

3 N.U.G.W.& G.L., Quarterly Balance Sheet, March 1905, p 5.

of the Ulster Unionists for a replacement for George Wyndham. In any case the bill which Long's successor at the Local Government Board introduced on 18 April still contained the controversial clause permitting the payment from the rates of men employed on farm colonies set up under the scheme. "It would be impossible", stated Balfour, "to set up statutory bodies, permanent bodies for statutory duties, and leave them entirely dependent upon voluntary subscriptions for their maintenance." The plan which he announced involved the creation of local London borough committees, the equivalent of the existing joint committees, supervised by a central body which was to be responsible for the creation of labour registries and bureaux. The local committees were not, he emphasised, empowered to provide work - this was the task of the central body. Each borough was to be asked to make a financial contribution to the scheme of the equivalent of a rate of ½d in the pound, to be increased to a 1d at the discretion of the Local Government Board. Outside of London the scheme was to have a more optional basis but all the details would be seen when members actually got the bill.[1]

In the press most papers concentrated on the Aliens Bill which had been introduced by the Home Secretary immediately after Balfour

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CXLV, 459-64.

had concluded his speech. Of those which did comment on the Unemployed Bill, the Mail combined the two and claimed that the ld rate would not be necessary if all foreign paupers were excluded from the country.[1] Later, The Times, having published letters from Clay, Loch, and Mackay of the C.O.S., all of them highly critical, stated that there were two inherent dangers in the proposals. One was that it would diminish the self reliance of any applicants, the other that it was very dangerous to abolish the disfranchisement rule for applicants.[2] The parliamentay correspondent of the Westminster Gazette asked if anyone could seriously believe that the government intended to pass any measures when it introduced the two most important on the same day. In any case, he added, the Labour M.P.'s would not support it because it was not compulsory over the whole country.[3]

Certainly this was one of labour's main criticisms of the bill. In an interview with the Labour Leader Hardie said that this was a major drawback and made the scheme outside London "very weak and ineffective."[4] The Railway Review's commentator on parliamentary affairs thought that this would lead to a flood of provincial unemployed descending on London in the mistaken belief that work would

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1 Daily Mail, 19 April, 1905.

2 The Times, 18 May, 1905.

3 Westminster Gazette, 19 April, 1905.

4 Labour Leader, 28 April, 1905.

automatically be found for them there.[1] Immediately after the bill's first reading the parliamentary committee of the T.U.C. met and passed resolutions to the effect that no plan would be satisfactory unless it was nationally operative and compulsory.[2] James Macdonald of the S.D.F. thought that the compulsion for London was good, but that it needed to be extended to the rest of the country, a view also held by Henderson.[3]

A second general criticism was levelled against the clause which dealt with the wages to be paid to men employed under the bill's provisions. They were to be less than the amount earned in a week by a general labourer of the lowest class. The general labour unions objected violently to this, while Ben Tillett said at the dockers' congress that it was a state organised scheme of black-legging.[4] At a meeting on 19 April the T.U.C. also resolved that the bill would not be satisfactory if it resulted in the unemployed being used to push down the earnings of general and unskilled workmen.[5]

From the left the criticisms were greater. An article in the Social Democrat summed up most of the federation's observations. As well as the points noted above, this article attacked the clause which

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1 Railway Review, 21 April, 1905.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905, p 64.

3 Trades and Labour Gazette, May 1905, p 2: Henderson in F.S.I., Ironfounders Monthly Report, May 1905, p 24.

4 Quoted in Charity Organisation Review, XVII (May 1905), p 284.

5 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905, p 64.

stated that no-one could apply to a distress committee for more than two years in succession, and claimed that a penny rate was not enough, this in accord with the long held S.D.F. policy that any scheme should be financed by the exchequer.[1] In Justice Fred Knee demanded to know why new authorities were being created and said that the existing ones should be utilised, perhaps because he was afraid that the S.D.F. would secured no representation on the new bodies at all, whereas if existing ones were used they did have some chance of being represented.[2] The most comprehensive list of S.D.F. criticisms came in a report compiled by a committee of the L.T.C., which was chaired by Harry Quelch and which consisted almost entirely of S.D.F. members. This committee also attacked the use of new authorities; demanded that the distress committees should provide work as well as passing applicants on to the central committee; asked for the removal of the clauses which threatened union wage rates; sought the removal of the limitation on the amount of rate money which was to be used and demanded that two-thirds of the cost come from the national exchequer; and finally, that the plan should be made nationally compulsory and applicable to Scotland and Ireland.[3]

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1 Social Democrat, IX (May 1905), pp 262-63.

2 Justice, 6 May, 1905.

3 Trades and Labour Gazette, June 1905, p 3.

It would be a mistake to think that labour had nothing but criticism for the bill, however. Justice said that it did have a triple importance. It recognised state responsibility for the unemployed, proposed to unify London for rating purposes (which, it will be remembered, the Social Democrats had tried to secure the previous year), and the proposal to equalise the rates.[1] Macdonald thought that the compulsion for London and the use of public funds were both good features.[2] Nearly all, whatever else they thought of the bill, interpreted it as an admission that the state was responsible for the unemployed. The Labour Leader thought it too timid but "it establishes the principle that the State is responsible for these crises which drive so many men out of work . . . ."[3] At the S.D.F. conference in April J.G.Webster, although condemning the bill as useless, said that the concession of state responsibility was its sole redeeming feature.[4] Hardie supported a resolution at the I.L.P. conference welcoming the measure for this reason.[5] When

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1 Justice, 22 April, 1905.

2 Trades and Labour Gazette, May 1905, p 2.

3 Labour Leader, 28 April, 1905.

4 S.D.F., Annual Report, 1905, p 24.

5 I.L.P., Annual Report, 1905, pp 40-1.

Quelch introduced his report to the members of the L.T.C. he too, prefaced his remarks with the comment that this was the bill's only importance. All these claims must have worried the government, for both the Balfours had emphasised that this was not the bill's intention. When he later gave evidence to the poor law commissioners Gerald Balfour stressed that the rate aid provision had been included in the bill precisely to avoid any impression that it was admitting the principle of state responsibility for the unemployed.[1] This widespread and contrary interpretation may explain the government's subsequent reluctance to persevere with the bill, although at Canterbury in October Akers Douglas went to great lengths to show that the slowness of government business during the spring had been due to the time consuming activities of the opposition before Easter.[2]

In spite of the measure's many shortcomings then, labour seems generally to have welcomed it and hoped for its passage, usually in an amended form. Hardie, who consulted with northern I.L.P. leaders in April, also met with London I.L.P. members at the house of commons in May, and it was announced that the bill was much better than had been expected. Many amendments had been drafted at these meetings and, said the Labour Leader, "with amendments it might go a

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1 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, Appendix VIII. (Cd. 5066). British Parliamentary Papers, 1910, XLVIII, p 14.

2 Kentish Gazette, 14 October, 1905.

long way towards solving the problem.[1]

By mid-May, however, doubts as to the government's good faith were beginning to manifest themselves, stimulated no doubt by the Prime Minister's refusal - or inability - on 19 April and again on 8 May to name a day for the bill's second reading. In Leicester 500 unemployed workers signed up to march on London in emulation of a group of striking boot makers from Raunds, who had won considerable public sympathy by just such an action, and soon similar marches were being organised in other towns. This alarmed several of the Labour M.P.'s, including Will Crooks.[2] MacDonald was also dismayed, feeling that "these disorganised bodies of unemployed . . . would seriously damage the chances of securing a rational and sympathetic consideration of the Unemployed Problem."[3] Carefully organised marches, however, were different, and after consultation with MacDonald, Hardie set about organising these under I.L.P. auspices. A circular (placed with the appropriate I.L.P. minute book) was sent to all local branches emphasising the need to keep out all rogues and wastrels when recruiting men for the marches, and it asked too, that

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1 Labour Leader, 12 May, 1905.

2 "W.C. and others very nervous about Leicester march . . . ." Burns Diaries, 16 May, 1905. B.M.Add.MSS 46323.

3 Undated memorandum in L.R.C., Letter Files, Vol 23, f 40, i. It is signed by MacDonald.

as many as possible of the artisan class be enrolled. Each man, added Hardie, should provide a blanket and his own food.[1] On 18 May Hardie was able to inform the Prime Minister that marches had been arranged to start from Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Glasgow.[2] The press was full of alarmist rumours, the Telegraph claiming that if the Leicester idea was taken up on a wide scale than arms would be required to quell the marchers.[3] "The metropolis", warned the Express, "is by no means prepared to wake up and find itself the Mecca of unemployed pilgrims."[4] On 15 May a stroke of fortune enabled Hardie to begin arranging a set of supporting demonstrations, this time in the form of massive public meetings all over the country. He explained in a circular to the branches marked "strictly confidential."

> 'This is to explain what has been appearing in the Press, about Great Demonstrations in connection with the Unemployed. The whole thing has arisen out of some recent consultations with MacDonald as to how best increase the prestige and standing of our movement . . . and to turn to most account the threatened march of Leicester's unemployed . . . .' 5

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1 I.L.P., Head Office Circulars (Unbound), n.d.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXVI, 774. 18 May, 1905.

3 Daily Telegraph, 16 May, 1905.

4 Daily Express, 18 May, 1905.

5 I.L.P., Head Office Circulars (Unbound), 16 May, 1905.

He went on to say that the previous day Joseph Fels, the land reformer, had turned up at I.L.P. headquarters with the offer of £200 to back some big effort on behalf of the unemployed, and that he and MacDonald had decided on a major demonstration in London as the climax of the provincial marches, with mass meetings to be held also in the provinces. For tactical reasons, he went on, they had decided to ask the L.R.C. to undertake the arrangements for the London meeting. "By this means, we hope to make the gathering a huge success, whilst we get the credit."[1] The same day Hardie wrote to Arthur Henderson, explaining his plans for mass demonstrations and asserting that "I am determined not to allow the bill to go under without making a big effort to save it."[2] In asking the L.R.C. to organise the operation Hardie said that the I.L.P. would provide expenses up to £150. The rest of the money offered by Fels presumably found its way into the I.L.P. funds. This offer, in fact, did present difficulties, for there was a good deal of suspicion among trade unionists about the motives of the I.L.P. , perhaps justifiably in view of Hardie's circular, and MacDonald suggested "if there is any feeling about the I.L.P. finding the whole of the

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1 I.L.P., Head Office Circulars (Unbound), 16 May, 1905.

2 Ibid., 16 May, 1905. This circular was a copy of Hardie' letter to Henderson.

money the difficulty might be got over. . . the I.L.P. would be appealed to among others and could then send its subscription."[1]

On 17 May yet another I.L.P. circular was issued asking the various local branches to organise demonstrations for 18 June in co-operation with all other labour bodies so that the date might "once again become a famous date in our National Records."[2] At a meeting of the L.R.C. held the following day, it was agreed to undertake responsibility for the London meeting.[3] At this point, however, Hardie seems to have dropped his plan to hold a series of provincial marches on London, a decision apparently reached at a joint meeting of the L.R.C., G.F.T.U., and the T.U.C. on 19 May.[4] Temporarily, too, the London demonstration was postponed until a deputation had presented amendments to the bill to Gerald Balfour on 25 May. "Further action", wrote J.S.Middleton, the assistant secretary of the L.R.C., "will depend upon the reception with which this deputation is met."[5]

Hardie's decision to abandon the marches probably had several

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1 Undated memorandum on the unemployed demonstrations, written by MacDonald. L.R.C., Letter Files, Vol 23, f 153.

2 I.L.P., Head Office Circulars (Unbound), 17 May, 1905.

3 The Infancy of the Labour Party, I, p 317. 18 May, 1905.

4 See Westminster Gazette, 20 May, 1905.

5 Circular signed by Middleton, 24 May, 1905. L.R.C., Letter Files, Vol 23, f 100.

explanations. It may well be that when he made his somewhat naive attempt to frighten the Prime Minister with the information that several marches had already been arranged, Balfour's firm reply impressed him. "I am of opinion that the arrangements of this house in regard to its own business ought not to be modified in one way or the other by any external demonstrations."[1] Perhaps equally significant was the fact that this statement won the gratitude of the press, and Hardie had sometimes shown himself to be sensitive to public opinion. In any case, as the Labour Leader pointed out, the scheme was beginning to run into some practical difficulties.[2] Finally, and perhaps most decisive of all, there was the opposition of several of the Labour M.P.'s. Burns noted in his diary that his opposition to the bill - and presumably, therefore, the efforts to push it through - provoked criticism from Henderson and Crooks, but "we beat them. Carried our point well. The rest of men stood like rocks beside me."[3]

Hardie informed his I.L.P. colleagues of his decision to abandon the marches on 21 May, but he was still determined to press for the

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXVI, 774. 18 May, 1905.

2 Labour Leader, 19 May, 1905.

3 Burns Diaries, 24 May, 1905. B.M.Add.MSS 46323.

measure, particularly after the joint labour deputation saw Balfour on 25 May.[1] Although the President of the Local Government Board met most of their points with direct refusals, he did point out that the scheme was compulsory outside London unless the Board exercised its exempting power, and that the weekly wage total only of men employed under the bill had to be less than that of the unskilled worker, not the hourly rate.[2] In an article written for the Labour Leader Hardie claimed that with all its faults the bill recognised three principles and was thus worth saving - communal responsibility to find work; public acceptance of the expenses involved; the removal of disfranchisement for men who were given help. If the machinery was brought into existence, he concluded, it would only require a trade crisis for all the restrictions to be swept away.[3] Despite the continued opposition of Burns the majority of the labour leaders seem to have been determined at this stage that the bill should be saved, and plans for the various demonstrations went ahead, even though the date of the London meeting was not settled until 2 June.[4]

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The first provincial demonstration took place at Sowerby in Yorkshire on 17 June, and three days later Gerald Balfour introduced

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1 I.L.P., N.A.C.Minutes, 21 May, 1905.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905, pp 64-5.

3 Labour Leader, 26 May, 1905.

4 See I.L.P., Head Office Circulars (Unbound), 2 June, 1905.

the second reading of the Unemployed Workmen Bill. That the government had been greatly alarmed by the labour interpretation of the measure as implying state responsibility for the unemployed was evident from the speeches of both Balfour and Long. The Prime Minister's brother emphasised that there was no question at all of the state being obliged to find work for men who had no job, and Long accused the bill's supporters of associating with it ideas which went further than the government was prepared to go. Although Broadhurst and Hardie, who spoke for labour during the debate, both said that they would support the bill if it was amended, particularly in respect of the wages clause and the rule that a man could not apply for work for more than two consecutive years, heavy criticism came from the government back benches, especially from Sir George Bartley.[1] Although the bill was given a second reading the government press was also much against it, and the Graphic predicted hopefully that "the Government will recognise the dangers that lurk in this hastily drafted measure and will prudently allow it to drop."[2]

By the end of the month rumours of this nature were in full flood in the labour press. Eltradion, the journal of the Electrical Trades Union, expected the bill to be dropped.[3] The parliamentary

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1 For the debate see Hansard, 4th Series, CLXVII, 1114-92. 20 June, 1905.

2 Daily Graphic, 21 June, 1905.

3 Eltradion, July 1905, p 49.

correspondent of the Railway Review was a little more optimistic, expecting it to reach the committee stage before actually being abandoned.[1] Justice said in June that the bill could hardly pass in view of the Conservative opposition to it, and in July the editor thought that Balfour was deliberately leaving it so that it would be too late to amend it, without which it would be useless.[2] This spate of rumours may explain the high number of demonstrations held in June and July, and the great degree of co-operation which took place between the various labour bodies. The list of places at which meetings were held was impressive - far more so than any previous attempt made by the S.D.F. to organise nation wide demonstrations, and this was probably due to the larger size of the I.L.P., the general support of trade unionists who were hard hit by unemployment, and, most important of all, the greater financial resources of the I.L.P. The whole campaign cost over £157 and of this the I.L.P. provided £100, the Fabian Society gave £10, George Lansbury and the A.S.E. both gave £20. The balance was made up of small contributions from small unions.[3] The meetings were held as follows and the estimated attendance figures are given, where recorded, in brackets.

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1 Railway Review, 23 June, 1905.

2 Justice, 24 June, 1905: ibid., 8 July, 1905.

3 Labour Party, Annual Report, 1906, p 34.

St Helens (1000)
Nottingham
Brechin
Pelling
Loughborough
Cardiff (1000)
Hyde
Preston
Stockport
Jarrow
Mexborough
Burton
Crewe
Liverpool (13-14,000)
Portsmouth (5,000)
Plymouth (1000)
Sheffield
Merthyr (2,000)
Ealing
Oxford (500)
Watford
Dundee
Manchester
Derby (2-3,000)
Bradford
Leeds
Yeadon
Gloucester
York (1000)
Kilmarnock
Newport (2,000)
Stockton
Rochdale
Halifax
Hull (3-4,000)
Normanton
Long Eaton
Norwich
Scarborough
Burnley (2,000)
West Bromwich (15,000)
Huddersfield
Islington
Finsbury
Birmingham (8-12,000)
Sunderland
Hanley
Ilkeston
Eccles
Wishaw
Altrincham
Barrow
Bristol
Dewsbury
Newcastle
Oldham
Swansea
Wakefield
Willesden
Woolwich
Grimsby
Middlesbrough
Rotherham
Warrington
Pudsey
Walthamstow [1]

That labour was solidly behind the L.R.C. can be seen not only from the attendance figures, however approximate and inaccurate these may have been, but also from the fact that in almost every area there was apparently full co-operation between all the labour and socialist organisations. Each meeting passed a resolution welcoming the bill as an acceptance of public responsibility to find work for those who were out of work, but demanding that it apply to the whole country, that all wage limits be removed, and that the bulk of the

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[1] This list is based on details given in the Labour Leader, June-July 1905, passim. Ibid., 21 July, 1905, claimed that over 100 had been held.

cost be found by the national exchequer.[1] Almost all the leading labour figures took part with the notable exception of Burns. Some idea of the scale of the meetings can perhaps be gleaned from the fact that the Woolwich Labour Representation Association printed 10,000 hand bills, 150 large posters, and 200 tickets.[2] The whole campaign really reached a climax with the London meeting held on 9 July. Although some 250 trade unions and 2000 unemployed men took part the total effect was ruined by torrential rain. None of this activity gained any press coverage. "No conspiracy of silence, no boycott of popular agitation", complained the Labour Leader, "was ever more complete than that of last Saturday's and Sunday's Unemployed Bill demonstrations by the London Press . . . not a single reference was made to the huge meetings held in scores of towns."[3] Nor was the London demonstration any more successful in this respect, the Express merely observing the day afterwards that suicide as a means of escape from poverty and unemployment appeared to be on the increase.[4]

It was claimed in some circles, however, that the demonstrations

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1 This was the resolution suggested by Hardie before the joint labour deputation saw Gerald Balfour on 25 May. See I.L.P., Head Office Circulars (Unbound), 16 May, 1905.

2 Woolwich L.R.A., Minutes, 27 June, 1905.

3 Labour Leader, 7 July, 1905.

4 Daily Express, 10 July, 1905.

produced some softening in the Prime Minister's attitude.[1] Possibly there may have been some truth in this, for on 13 July, just after the London meeting, Balfour said that the bill would go through - but only if the controversial rate aid clause was removed. It is worth noting that only the previous week the wealthy London boroughs had protested very strongly against this provision at a meeting of the L.C.C. On 17 July Balfour told the wives of London's unemployed that the bill would be passed once the present negotiations were completed; this on the same day that the Mail advised the government to relegate the bill "to the limbo from which it should never have emerged."[2] One day after Hardie warned the government that if the hopes of the unemployed were blasted again they would not slink back passively into their hovels, Gerald Balfour presented the amended bill.[3] The measure was now to be an experiment for ten years, and there was to be no rate aid to maintain men in farm colonies, money to be raised entirely from voluntary subscriptions. There were other minor changes, too, but these were the ones in which labour was vitally interested.

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1 Labour Leader, 21 July, 1905.

2 Daily Mail, 17 July, 1905.

3 Hardie made his statement at Birmingham. See the Clarion, 21 July, 1905.

The revised bill was condemned outright by the Labour Leader, which termed it the "most indecent fraud ever perpetrated upon the working classes."[1] Hardie, who called it an "airy superstructure without any solid foundation", wasted no time in raising a petition signed by 7 lord mayors, 11 leading churchmen, 27 M.P.'s, and 21 others, including Lansbury and Alden.[2] It asked that the government, "which has made itself responsible for that Bill (i.e. the original one) will insist, in spite of any opposition and obstruction . . . on passing the Bill into law this Session."[3] As Justice pointed out, this was somewhat incongruous as only a few weeks before the Labour members had decided to support the bill only if it was rigorously amended in line with their criticisms of it; now Hardie was pleading for the original.[4] The Labour M.P.'s were certainly more divided than ever, for at a party meeting on 24 July Hardie, Henderson, and Shackleton joined Burns in opposing the new draft, even though most of the others were still in favour of it passing.[5] Both Broadhurst and Crooks supported the redrafted version, Hardie stating during the

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1 Labour Leader, 28 July, 1905.

2 Ibid., 11 August, 1905.

3 Ibid., 28 July, 1905.

4 Justice, 29 July, 1905.

5 Burns Diaries, 24 July, 1905. B.M.Add.MSS 46323.

report stage that it was only respect for the latter's judgement that was preventing him from dividing against it when the vote was taken.[1] But despite these divisions the L.R.C. had no intention of letting the pressure relax, as MacDonald explained when he wrote to all the groups which had participated in the summer demonstrations.

> 'I am instructed to say that the L.R.C. does not propose to allow the cause of the Unemployed to drop. So soon as we know what the purpose of the Government is exactly we shall consider plans for organising on a national scale an agitation to demand that something shall be done immediately on the lines of the resolutions on unemployment passed at our Liverpool Conference last January.' [2]

The government's purpose was apparently made clear when, on 31 July, Balfour omitted the Unemployed Bill from a list of those which were to be passed before the session ended. When challenged by Hardie he said that he would not include the rate aid clause and that without it the bill's supporters did not seem very keen. At least, he added, he had received little encouragement for the redrafted measure.[3] But then, just as it seemed that the government had decided to let the bill die, perhaps using the labour divisions as further justification,

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CLI, 429-31. 7 August, 1905.

2 Infancy of the Labour Party, I, p 331. 29 July, 1905.

3 Hansard, 4th Series, CL, 1008-30. 31 July, 1905.

there came the first sign of the uncontrolled violence which Hardie had predicted as a result of the government's procrastination. A large group of unemployed in Manchester, allegedly obstructing traffic, refused to disperse and were broken up forcibly by a police baton charge. Hardie promptly sent off a congratulatory telegram saying that the spirit of Peterloo was once more abroad in England and that now they would win their fight.[1] There was a great deal of uneasiness in the press because, as one journalist pointed out, such things happened so rarely in England.[2]

It was no coincidence that on 2 August, the day after the Manchester riot, the government began manoeuvres to extricate itself from the difficult position in which it now found itself. A royal commission to investigate the poor law and the whole problem of poverty and distress was announced in reply to what Beatrice Webb later termed "an evidently pre-arranged question."[3] Gerald Balfour's statement that the government was anxious for the bill to be tried as an experiment for three years contrasted strangely with his brother's earlier omission of the measure from the list of those to go through

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1 Labour Leader, 4 August, 1905.

2 Daily Telegraph, 1 August, 1905.

3 B.Webb, Our partnership (London, 1948), p 317.

before the end of the session. By 7 August the amended bill had passed the commons, having resisted Hardie's two attempts to reinstate the rate aid clause, and two days later it had passed the lords as well. During the debates the government speakers, particularly Arthur Balfour, went to some trouble to make it appear that the royal commission was part of a long considered strategy. "I have now to say . . . that, having given full consideration to the question, we are of opinion that the time has now come when full inquiry . . . ought to be undertaken."[1] But if the government had in fact been considering a commission for some time, why was there no previous mention of it in Balfour's correspondence, and why was it not until early September that he began thinking about its composition? The only evidence to suggest that the government had considered a commission prior to 2 August consists of a letter written to Balfour by Walter Long - in December 1904. It was in reply to Balfour's request as to how he should answer a letter from Herbert Samuel who had proposed to him that a commission on the poor law and unemployment be set up. Long had suggested that Balfour agree with Samuel that there was much to be said for the idea but the present time was not opportune.[2] If there had

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CL, 1348. 2 August, 1905.

2 W.Long to A.J.Balfour, 6 December, 1904. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add. MSS 49776, f 38.

been any serious intention of appointing a commission, why had no mention of it been made to the various labour deputations, for it would have proved an admirable way of avoiding awkward questions? In February the Prime Minister told Shackleton that any tampering with the poor laws would be a dangerous thing.[1] On 9 May Gerald Balfour had stated in reply to a question from Hardie that the government had no intention of setting up a committee to investigate the working of the poor law.[2] As late as 26 July the government had said that the Unemployed Workmen Bill was to be a ten year experiment, and yet by 2 August it had been reduced to three years, the natural corollary of a royal commission whose report could reasonably be expected within that time.[3] "Let us confess", declared the Standard, "what ministers will hardly deny, that the Royal Commission was an afterthought suggested by the Parliamentary difficulty in which they found themselves . . . ."[4]

Thus the evidence suggests very strongly that the government, alarmed by the ugly incident in Manchester, decided to resurrect a bill which had virtually been pronounced dead on 31 July, offsetting labour

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1 Report of a deputation . . . on unemployment, p 14. In T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CXLV, 1346. 9 May, 1905.

3 See p 131.

4 Standard, 5 August, 1905.

criticism by appointing a royal commission to imply that once more information was available, a more radical approach could be adopted. In any case, Balfour must have known that, barring a miracle, it would be a Liberal Government which would have the task of acting upon the commission's recommendations. The Labour Leader had no doubts that it was the Manchester riots which had stimulated the government's change of heart, claiming that Balfour had "evidently been shaken by events in Manchester."[1] Another labour journal suggested that when the riot began "hon. members suddenly developed a great anxiety to pass a Bill which but a short time previously they had in their own minds relegated to the House of Commons waste paper basket."[2] Mr. Bentley Gilbert's account of the general factors underlying the creation of the poor law commission seem somewhat over-simplified in the light of the above considerations.[3]

Even though Balfour had removed from the bill the clause which had caused so much trouble with his party followers, many labour writers and leaders still interpreted it as acknowledging state responsibility for the unemployed, not now by extending the principle

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1 Labour Leader, 4 August, 1905.

2 Typographical Circular, September 1905, p 5.

3 See B.Gilbert, The evolution of national insurance in Great Britain (London, 1966), pp 235-38.

of local financial responsibility to its logical conclusion that the state was ultimately responsible, but deducing it from the simple fact that the government had legislated for the unemployed.[1] This was the view taken by a writer in the Clarion, even though, he said, the bill was "a poor lopped off measure."[2] When James Sexton attacked the measure at the T.U.C.'s September conference he was censured by the Labour Leader which said that it was important for its recognition of state responsibility.[3] In Justice, "Flashlights" said the same.[4] It is noticeable that Balfour went to great lengths in a speech he made at Bradford to contradict this impression, and one wonders how far its existence explains the harshness of the Local Government Board regulations issued for the Act's administration in September and October?[5]

All through the summer months the interests of the working classes and their leaders had been focussed on the struggle for the Unemployed

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1 For the earlier interpretation see Buxton's letter to Campbell Bannerman. "I think . . . it is not yet generally realised what a tremendous principle is involved. . . that it is the duty of the locality(and therefore logically of the State . . .) to provide work. . . ." S.Buxton to H.Campbell Bannerman, 16 January, 1905. Campbell Bannerman Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 41238, f 10.

2 Clarion, 11 August, 1905.

3 Labour Leader, 8 September, 1905.

4 Justice, 19 August, 1905.

5 The speech was reported in The Times, 1 November, 1905.

Bill and now that the struggle was over, many trade unionists apparently turned back to more traditional ways of tackling the problem. Thus both Richard Bell speaking at Caerphilly and William Abraham addressing the miners' conference advised trade unionists that the main lesson of the summer had been the need to send more working class men to the house of commons.[1] The demand for a reduction of hours was never very deep under the surface of labour thought in the context of unemployment, and now it re-asserted itself in union circles. A fresh debate began in the columns of the carpenters' and joiners' magazine, and also in the Monthly Report of the boot and shoe operatives. In moving a resolution at the T.U.C. for the reduction of hours, J.R.Clynes gave much weight to its effects on the employment situation.[2] The L.T.C. passed a similar resolution in early September, but perhaps the most significant of all, however, was the September report of the G.F.T.U., which said that the whole question had long been drifting in the wrong direction and that reduced working hours were the answer to unemployment.[3]

More immediately, however, the T.U.C. decided to make the best of

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1 Bell was reported in The Times, 13 September, 1905. For Abraham's speech see M.F.G.B., Annual Report, 1905, p 67.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905, p 149.

3 For the L.T.C. resolution see Trades and Labour Gazette, September 1905, p 5. For the G.F.T.U. view see G.F.T.U., Quarterly Report, September 1905, p 7.

the opportunity offered by the government and, on the initiative of the L.T.C., agitated for a direct labour representative to be appointed to the poor law commission. Even though it was announced at the September congress that the Prime Minister was considering their request, no reply was forthcoming and it was decided to contact Balfour again.[1] It was of no avail, however, for when the names of the commissioners were announced at the end of November the only ones thought to be sympathetic to the cause of labour were those of George Lansbury, Beatrice Webb, and Charles Booth. As the other commissioners included C.S.Loch of the C.O.S., Samuel Provis, the reactionary head of the Local Government Board, and charity workers such as Mrs. Bosanquet and Octavia Hill, it was not surprising that one trade unionist said that the names were enough to send shivers of horror down the backs of all working men.[2] The newly created joint board, representing the L.R.C., the T.U.C., and the G.F.T.U., issued a vigorous protest.[3]

As for the socialists, they were agreed on making the fullest possible use of the Unemployed Act in order to expose fully its

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1 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 15 November, 1905.

2 In Eltradion, December 1905, p 129.

3 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1905, p 77.

deficiencies, and the last few months of 1905 witnessed a considerable degree of co-operation between the S.D.F. and the I.L.P., although some of the I.L.P. members, such as MacDonald, had reservations about it. The policy of killing the Unemployed Act by using it had originally been advocated by Fred Knee almost as soon as it had become law.[1] Both parties took steps to organise the unemployed more effectively than ever before to press for further reform. In August the I.L.P. announced in a branch circular that a series of meetings would be held in industrial centres to consider how to make the new legislation effective, to enrol the unemployed in a permanent organisation, and to insist on the right to work. Some socialists, such as H.Russell Smart, had wanted the Labour M.P.'s to insist that a clause be included in the act "providing that every man able and willing to work shall have the right to demand employment under the conditions of the Bill", and it seems that Hardie, perhaps disillusioned by the events of the summer, decided now to go for this whole-hearted socialist aim.[2] Maybe, too, the establishment of the Right to Work movement had something to do with the disappearance of the N.U.C. Certainly there had been some opposition to the broadly-based N.U.C.

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1 Justice, 19 August, 1905.

2 Russell Smart advocated this in the Labour Leader, 12 May, 1905. He continued to press for the adoption of the principle. See the Clarion, 6 October, 1905.

from I.L.P. members demanding a more socialist policy.[1] By September Hardie had supplied each branch with fifty copies of his latest pamphlet on unemployment. By the end of the following month eight local Right to Work committees had been formed, and on 2 November Hardie chaired a meeting of delegates from various labour and socialist organisations, all invited as individuals, to consider the formation of a National Right to Work Council. This was not set up, as E.I.Champness asserts, in 1908.[2] Originally it had been hoped that the Labour M.P.'s would carry out the task of forming the council but only two, Hardie and Shackleton, had turned up at the meeting called to discuss it, and as Shackleton was against the launching of such a movement anyway, it was decided that it should be undertaken by an independent body, such as the I.L.P.[3] Now in November a small committee was set up, charged with the tasks of drawing up a national manifesto, securing funds, and making provision for the election of a full committee. This movement was welcomed by the Social Democrats in contrast with their hostile reception of the N.U.C. in 1903. This favourable reaction may have been due to the fact that the new body was entirely socialist in composition and was

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1 See p 62.

2 E.I.Champness, Frank Smith M.P. (London, 1943), p 32.

3 See the circular prepared by MacDonald and dated 21 October, 1905. In L.R.C., Letter Files, Vol 26, f 95.

committed to a socialist programme, unlike the N.U.C., which had been the brainchild of a radical, consisted of a Liberal-Labour alliance, and had had a comparatively moderate objective. George Barnes was the chairman of the National Right to Work Council, the treasurer was Lansbury, and the committee members included Hardie, Curran, Frank Rose, MacDonald, Mrs. Cobden Sanderson, Mary Macarthur, and Harry Quelch. The inclusion of Quelch and Mrs Cobden Sanderson, who were both members of the S.D.F., may also explain the federation's support of the council. It may have been also, that the S.D.F., which had always favoured more militant action, hoped that the council would use the methods of mass demonstration used by the L.R.C. in the summer. By the beginning of December twenty-one local committees were in existence and Justice appealed for many more.[1]

Yet another reason for the federation's friendliness towards the new council was that the executive was hoping to organise a nation wide agitation. Working through the medium of the L.T.C. the federation had secured the summoning on 30 September of a conference of London unions and socialist organisations, although it pointedly omitted to invite the L.R.C. to send delegates.[2] Altogether

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1 Justice, 2 December, 1905.

2 See J.R.MacDonald to W.Sanders, 25 September, 1905. L.R.C., Letter Files Vol 25, f 287.

representatives of 96 unions, 4 I.L.P. branches, the Fabian Society, the S.D.F. executive and London District Council all attended, and it was decided to set up the London Central Workers' Committee, with the aim of co-ordinating agitation in London and establishing local committees in each borough to press the councils to put the new Unemployed Act into fullest possible use. Just how far the S.D.F. dominated this body can be seen from the fact that Quelch was the chairman, and that eight of the fifteen committee members were also federation members - Knee, Hunter Watts, Patterson, Williams, McLeod, Wall, Stokes, and Kay.[1] On 3 October the S.D.F. wrote to the I.L.P. suggesting that a national joint committee be formed to co-ordinate action on a national scale. The contents of the letter indicated that the S.D.F. had been impressed by the success of the I.L.P.'s summer efforts, which compared very favourably with the small response to the federation's own efforts to organise a national demonstration in January. MacDonald was totally against any co-operation with the Social Democrats, telling the secretary of the I.L.P. metropolitan council that he had "the best evidence for believing that the matter is only another S.D.F. dodge to hamper the L.R.C. . . ."[2] He must

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1 Justice, 2 December, 1905.

2 J.R.MacDonald to W.Sanders, 25 September, 1905. L.R.C., Letter Files, Vol 25, f 287.

have had supporters within the I.L.P., for the reply urged the Social Democrats to co-operate with the L.R.C. in the new Right to Work Council currently being formed.[1]

All this activity on the socialist front was creating some apprehension in official circles. According to Sir Almeric Fitzroy, the Bishop of Stepney was "very apprehensive of the difficulties in the East End likely to arise from the numbers of the unemployed."[2] Balfour told Lord MountStephen that socialists were "endeavouring to turn the present distress to political account."[3] He probably gained this impression from Sandars, who had earlier written to him explaining the steps taken by the London police to cope with the threatened unemployed demonstrations, adding that the Social Democrat agitators were very busy. "Their aims are political. They see a General Election in sight and they mean to demonstrate their power."[4]

Initially the L.C.W.C. was far more active than its national counterpart. Immediately after it was formed two circulars were issued giving instructions as to what action should be urged on the

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1 I.L.P., N.A.C.Minutes, 3 October, 1905.

2 A.Fitzroy, Memoirs (London: Two Vols., 1925), I, pp 267-68.

3 A.J.Balfour to Lord MountStephen, 15 December, 1905. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 49858, f 35.

4 J.Sandars to A.J.Balfour, 7 October, 1905. Ibid., B.M.Add.MSS 49764, f 16.

local distress committees, and also seeking support for the adoption of Quelch and Williams on to the central unemployed committee created by the Unemployed Act. This effort was stimulated when the Local Government Board eventually issued the orders for the measure's administration, their tardiness doing nothing to sweeten labour tempers.[1] The first set of regulations, issued in mid-September, had not provoked much comment. They were mainly concerned with the composition of the distress committees and only Fred Jowett bothered to protest against the way in which the members were to be appointed. He claimed that for the local councils to select the members from lists of suitable candidates submitted by various designated parties lacked the safeguard of popular control.[2] The bitterest criticism came with the issue of the second set of orders in October, mainly because they contradicted promises given by the government in the summer. Knee, for example, pointed out that the proviso against men receiving work in more than two successive years, which had been omitted from the redrafted Act, had re-appeared in the regulations.[3] Hardie accused the government of a breach of faith as

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1 See, for example, the comments in the Labour Leader, 15 September, 1905.

2 Clarion, 13 October, 1905.

3 Justice, 14 October, 1905.

the orders stipulated that the men taken on for work were to be paid at an hourly rate less than that of the ordinary unskilled labourer, although Balfour had previously said that it was to be the weekly total, not the hourly rate, which was to be less.[1] This was also resented by the T.U.C., which was afraid that it would force down union wage rates. When the T.U.C. sub-committee on unemployment convened on 30 November, it issued a detailed criticism of the regulations. The clause limiting relief to men who had not applied for poor law relief in the previous twelve months was condemned as "a cruel hardship"; the twelve month residential qualification necessary for a person to apply to the distress committee was felt to be unrealistic since the most likely people to apply would be casual workers and others who could not stay in one place for a year; so was the clause which limited the work provided to sixteen weeks a year which, said the report, "declares that Unemployment only exists for 16 weeks a year, which proposition we strenuously oppose . . . ." The committee's report concluded with an attack on the personal record paper which, under the regulations, every applicant would have to complete.[2] This detailed personal inquiry also infuriated Hardie, who said that it had the "C.O.S. stamped

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1 Labour Leader, 20 October, 1905.

2 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 30 November, 1905.

across every page."[1] Later he claimed that "unless a person . . . can show the rudiments of angels' wings already in the sprouting stage, he or she may go hang for anything the Act will do for them."[2]

The C.W.C. took its opposition to the regulations even further, sending Gerald Balfour a letter of protest about what was considered to be the government's duplicity. The reply, however, merely stated that the orders had been made after very careful consideration and that as the committees for their administration had not yet been appointed, nothing could be done.[3] This led to a considerable emphasis by both main socialist parties on the need to gain working class representation on the distress committees. But as far as can be seen, they were not very successful. The S.D.F. secured two representatives on the committees in Battersea, Shoreditch, and Croydon, three at Camberwell, four at St.Pancras, and five at West Ham.[4] The I.L.P. managed to secure a few, but in London the effort was totally mismanaged. MacDonald wrote to Hardie complaining that the party's London organiser was at fault.

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1 Labour Leader, 20 October, 1905.

2 J.K.Hardie, John Bull and his unemployed (London, 1905), p 11.

3 The Times, 10 November, 1905.

4 See Justice, October-December 1905, passim.

> 'So far as I can make out there are several nominations of our kind of people few of whom know that the others are up. Now Sanders is paid to look after the interests of the I.L.P. in London and for his £50 he ought to put himself to the trouble of getting some unity imparted into our action. Instead of that things have been allowed to drift and once more the I.L.P. looks as if it were going to be out of it . . . it is all very sickening. . . .' [1]

In spite of these failures other forms of agitation continued. A massive march of the unemployed, headed by 3000 women, paraded through the west end to see the Prime Minister, who coldly re-affirmed that, despite the widespread interpretation to the contrary, the Unemployed Workmen Act had not been designed to secure the right to work for all men. It is indicative of the new spirit of co-operation between the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. that I.L.P. branches passed resolution sympathising at the failure of this effort, which had been organised by the federation.[2] A major demonstration was also organised when the King's Labour Tents were opened in Holborn Kingsway, and the launching of a special relief fund by the Queen was claimed by the C.W.C. to be a result of their pressure.[3] This may seem an ambitious claim, but it

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1 Quoted in P.Thompson, Socialist, Liberal and Labour (London, 1967), p 222.

2 See Labour Leader, 17 November, 1905.

3 See O.B.S., Trade Circular and General Reporter, December 1905, p 12.

is worth noting that Arthur Balfour wrote to his brother in November saying that "she (the Queen) has of course been 'got at' by the people whose ideas as to the administration of the Act, if given effect to, would land us in disaster."[1] In one week alone Justice claimed that the C.W.C. had forced the Battersea Distress Committee to endorse their own proposals, led deputations to the Bethnal Green Guardians, and to councils in Southwark, Fulham, Hammersmith, and Hackney, and that they were holding weekly propaganda meetings in Kensington, Poplar, Paddington, and Westminster.[2]

But in spite of all this activity the committee was achieving very little in real terms. Balfour told Sir Frank Younghusband that it was "curious that they should suppose . . . they can terrorise us into any such absolutely fatal admission as that it is the duty of the State to find remunerative work for everyone desiring it."[3] Nor had the committee, despite its apparent dissociation from the S.D.F., avoided the financial problem which had always beset the federation's own efforts. At the end of November an appeal for financial help was issued by the L.T.C. on behalf of the C.W.C.[4] A letter in Justice

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1 A.Balfour to G.Balfour, 18 November, 1905. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add. MSS 49831, f 16.

2 Justice, 18 November, 1905.

3 A.Balfour to Sir F.Younghusband, 21 November, 1905. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 49858, f 42.

4 Read at the executive meeting of the O.B.S. on 24 November, 1905. See O.B.S., Trade Circular and General Reporter, December 1905, p 12.

from Fred Knee said that it would be criminal to let the agitation drop now, but the S.D.F. had no funds, and the C.W.C. had no power to appoint a full time organiser. He asked if thirty people would each agree to subscribe 1/- per week for the next thirteen weeks so that Jack Williams could be paid to work as a full time unemployed organiser.[1] Suggestive of the co-operation between S.D.F. and I.L.P. - at least in the context of unemployed agitation - was that fact that two of the people who responded to Knee's appeal were Hardie and Frank Smith.[2] This may have been because the Right to Work Council's own operations were very slow. By the time Arthur Balfour resigned in December 1905 the council had barely managed to produce its manifesto.[3]

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1 Justice, 25 November, 1905.

2 See the list of contributors in ibid., 2 December, 1905.

3 The N.A.C. of the I.L.P. received the manifesto on 6 December, two days after Balfour tendered his resignation to the King. See I.L.P., N.A.C.Minutes, 6 December, 1905.

Chapter 3. The First Liberal Year.

The resignation of the government was not, said Justice, an excuse to neglect the needs of the unemployed. On the contrary, the matter was all the more important because the past statements of Liberal leaders had not been very promising.[1] Certainly at various times over the past three years Liberals had come under heavy fire from labour and socialist writers for their lack of a policy on unemployment. During the crisis of October 1904, for example, "Gavroche" observed in the Labour Leader that neither Liberal leaders nor the Liberal press were talking about unemployment.[2] This was hardly surprising. After a meeting of the National Liberal Federation in November of 1904 a circular was sent round to all Liberal constituency officers urging them to keep the issue of free trade firmly in the centre of public attention, and in extolling the virtues of free trade the Liberals could hardly talk at length about the heavy unemployment which it was alleged by many to have produced.[3] Thus an article in the November edition of the Social Democrat

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1 Justice, 9 December, 1905.

2 Labour Leader, 7 October, 1904.

3 N.L.F., Annual Report, 1905, p 18.

claimed that "the unemployed have no reason to expect any more consideration from the Liberals than the Tories . . . ."[1] These accusations were perhaps not wholly justified, for, as has been seen, the Liberals were sufficiently interested for Gladstone to suggest the formation of an unofficial committee on unemployment, and to circulate his memorandum.[2] But even after this the speeches of Liberal leaders still failed to excite much enthusiasm from labour. At Manchester on 30 November, 1904, Campbell Bannerman received a deputation of unemployed workers, and the Labour Leader commented sadly that "he could promise to do nothing. . . no opinions . . . no proposals . . . not even a programme. . . ."[3] Even after his more ambitious speech at Limehouse the paper could see only signs of a more sympathetic attitude, but no indication that he was prepared to treat the matter as a question of national urgency.[4] James Macdonald wrote that he had wriggled violently when asked if the government, in his view, ought to finance national works.[5] Only Gladstone, who spoke at Leeds on 5 December of the need for the government to undertake such work, won any praise from the labour press, Justice expressing

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1 Social Democrat, VIII (November 1904), p 650.

2 See pp 98-9.

3 Labour Leader, 9 December, 1904.

4 Ibid., 23 December, 1904.

5 Trades and Labour Gazette, January 1905, p 2.

the hope that he would endeavour to convert his colleagues.[1]

If he tried to do this Gladstone was evidently unsuccessful. William Beveridge, invited by Herbert Samuel to address a meeting of Liberal M.P.'s in March 1905 on unemployment, was very surprised when the audience suddenly left in the middle of his lecture to answer a summons to the division lobby, and he gained the impression that they had not thought very much about the subject. After the meeting C.P.Trevelyan, another of the group of Liberal members, which included Gladstone, Samuel, and Buxton, who were concerned that the party should have an advanced programme of social reform, including an unemployment policy, apologised to him for the lack of intelligence shown by those who had attended the meeting.[2] Gladstone was more successful, however, when he urged Campbell Bannerman to make a speech on the Unemployed Workmen Bill, just to show that Liberals were concerned about the unemployed.[3] Augustine Birrell was another who was anxious to improve the Liberal image in this respect. In asking Buxton to move a resolution at a Liberal meeting demanding

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1 *Justice*, 10 December, 1904.

2 W.H.Beveridge to his mother, 4 March, 1905. Beveridge Papers. L, 1, 203.

3 H.Gladstone to H.Campbell Bannerman, 17 April, 1905. Campbell Bannerman Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 41217, f 210.

permanent machinery to deal with unemployment, he stated that "it ought to be moved by a front bench man in order to prove our good faith and show that we mean business."[1] But the socialists at least, remained unconvinced. Justice claimed that the Liberals would only go as far as they were pushed.[2] "Gavroche" again noticed that at the height of the summer unemployed demonstrations the Liberals were also holding demonstrations - but were not mentioning unemployment. Although Liberalism had once meant something, he added, it had now become "a kind of lavatory where the parvenus tidy themselves up . . . before they press in amongst the old nobility."[3] Hardie, with some foresight, said that even if the Liberals genuinely intended to do something for the unemployed once they were in power, there would be all sorts of party disputes, probably involving the house of lords, and that as a result the unemployed would be forgotten. This, he said, was one of the considerations behind his eventual acceptance of the redrafted Unemployed Bill in the summer.[4]

Nor were these doubts about Liberal policies in any way reduced

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1 A.Birrell to S.Buxton, 7 May, 1905. Buxton Papers.

2 Justice, 13 May, 1905.

3 Labour Leader, 23 June, 1905.

4 J.K.Hardie, The Unemployed Bill (London, 1905), p 15.

once it became clear that Balfour's days at Downing Street were numbered. If anything they increased, particularly when Edward Grey said at Dudley on 15 November, 1905, that the solution lay in land reform, education, housing and temperance legislation.[1] This was followed by a vague statement from Campbell Bannerman at Portsmouth to the effect that "whatever we do in the matter, I think it will be more deliberate and effective than this."[2] Still worse was to follow. At Walthamstow a few days later John Morley declared that he had no remedy for unemployment at all.[3] Immediately before Balfour resigned, Campbell Bannerman told Asquith that "much mischief was being done by the notion that we had little or nothing to say about the unemployed."[4] This indeed was the substance of a charge made by Macdonald of the S.D.F., when he accused the Liberals of completely ignoring the question and of being content to trot out all the old free trade fallacies.[5] The Social Democrat repeated its claim that nothing could be expected of the Liberals and said that it was up to the working class candidates to emphasise unemployment during the

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1 National Union Gleanings, XXV (1905), p 413.

2 The Times, 17 November, 1905. The reference was to the Unemployed Workmen Act.

3 Ibid., 21 November, 1905.

4 H.Campbell Bannerman to H.H.Asquith, 1 December, 1905. Asquith Papers. Vol 10, f 173.

5 Trades and Labour Gazette, November 1905, p 2.

general election campaign.[1] Most of these criticisms came from socialists, but trade unionists tended to be a little more cautious. When a resolution demanding a special short session of parliament to enable the new Liberal Government to deal with unemployment was moved at a meeting of the L.T.C., it was overwhelmingly defeated, the opposition being led by Pou of the cigar makers, who said that the demand, made by Social Democrat members of the council, was unreasonable because the Liberals had not yet had a chance to show what they could do.[2] Hardie, perhaps tactfully in view of the electoral pact with the Liberals, was another who was prepared to give the new administration a chance, Although Campbell Bannerman had obstructed any constructive action by the 1893 Unemployed Committee, wrote Hardie, "it may be that he has repented. . . and is prepared to atone for the past by his good deeds in the future."[3]

Much obviously depended on who was appointed to the Local Government Board and thus given responsibility for the unemployed. When John Burns was given the job, it did not come as a complete surprise. In October 1904, for example, an article in the Trades and

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1 Social Democrat, IX (December 1905), pp 705-06.

2 Trades and Labour Gazette, January 1906, p 6.

3 Quoted in W.Stewart, J.K.Hardie (London, 1921), p 196.

Labour Gazette had advocated giving him this very post.[1] But now great hostility came from his former colleagues in the S.D.F., and also from the extremist socialist parties. The S.P.G.B. condemned his appointment as a mere vote catcher.[2] The S.L.P. claimed, more colourfully, that "he has bought his seat on the Cabinet with Labour's blood."[3] His old S.D.F. branch at Battersea issued a press statement which said that his appointment was the "crowning act and the reward for a whole series of betrayals of the class to which he belonged . . . ."[4] Harry Quelch thought that Burns had received the just reward for his apostasy.[5] Other socialists, however, were not so damning. Hardie was again cautiously - or perhaps tactfully - optimistic, although he reserved his final judgement until Burns had had a chance to prove himself.[6] This was also the attitude of Harry Snell and A.M.Thompson.[7] Trade unionists seem generally to have been

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1 London Trades and Labour Gazette, October 1904, p 2. See also ibid., April 1904, p 2: Railway Review, 3 April, 1904: Justice, 4 April, 1904.

2 Socialist Standard, 6 January, 1906.

3 Socialist, December 1905, p 8.

4 Quoted in W.Kent, Labour's lost leader (London, 1951), p 158.

5 Justice, 16 December, 1905.

6 Labour Leader, 22 December, 1905.

7 Snell in the Labour Record and Review, January 1906, p 324: Thompson in the Clarion, 15 December, 1905.

pleased that Burns had found his way into the cabinet. The writer of "In the Conning Tower", a regular feature in the Typographical Circular, was very hopeful, while the Railway Clerk carried a long eulogy of Burns in its first January issue.[1] Richard Bell told the members of this union that no-one was better suited for the job.[2] In the columns of the journal of the A.S.C.J. resolutions of congratulations to Burns appeared.[3] The clash of opinion between socialist and trade unionist was to some extent symbolised at the L.T.C. meeting on 14 December, when Fred Knee opposed a resolution applauding Burns' appointment. He was supported by all the S.D.F. members of the council and the resolution was declared lost when the voting went 37 - 37.[4]

By and large, the first action of the new government justified the attitude of those who were prepared to give it a chance, as far as unemployment was concerned. It is true that when the C.W.C. led a deputation to the new Prime Minister, asking for the Unemployed Act to be financed from the national exchequer, Campbell Bannerman, though quite sympathetic, refused to pledge himself to such a course of

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1 Typographical Circular, January 1906, p 4: Railway Clerk, 7 January, 1906.

2 A.S.R.S., Annual Report, 1905, pp 3-4.

3 A.S.C.J., Monthly Journal, January 1906, p 23.

4 Trades and Labour Gazette, January 1906, p 8. The resolution was passed at a subsequent meeting by 75 votes to 35. See ibid., March 1906, p 6.

action without first consulting his colleagues. As a result the committee began to organise marches of the unemployed through London's west end, and letters of protest appeared in the papers again for the first time since the winter of 1903. "How long", demanded Sir Arthur Clay, "is this sordid farce to be allowed to continue?"[1] But on the credit side a circular, which came into effect in January, was issued by the Local Government Board on 8 December relaxing the regulation which denied work under the 1905 Act to any who had previously been in receipt of poor law relief. The government was also thinking of giving a place on the poor law commission to a direct nominee of trade unionism, for on 29 January, 1906, Burns told Lord Ripon that he thought Campbell Bannerman was contemplating "the addition of one more member who would be more directly representative of Trade Unionism."[2] It is perhaps indicative of the unions' confidence in the Liberal Government that the parliamentary committee of the T.U.C. had already decided on 20 December to recommend Francis Chandler of the A.S.C.J. as a suitable person to serve on the commission.[3]

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1 The Times, 15 December, 1905.

2 J.Burns to Lord Ripon, 29 January, 1906. Burns Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 46299, f 37.

3 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 20 December, 1905.

Finally, although it was not, of course, public knowledge, a cabinet unemployment committee was set up, consisting of Burns, Ripon, Asquith, Gladstone, and Buxton.[1]

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Unemployment did not figure very prominently in the election campaign of 1906. In his study A.K.Russell places social reform, of which unemployment was one aspect, fourth in importance in a list of electoral issues, tariff reform being the most significant.[2] Russell's detailed local studies show, however, that in some northern cities tariff reform was presented in terms of unemployment, so much so that the Liberal Magazine accused the tariff reformers of "shameless exploitation" of unemployment as "merely so much grist for the Tariff Reform Mill."[3] The T.U.T.R.A., which had been continuing its work quietly since its foundation in 1904, produced an election manifesto appealing to all trade unionists to vote in favour of fiscal reform as the only answer to unemployment, the dominant issue at stake.[4] This was backed by the T.R.L., which

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1 Burns Diaries, 14 December, 1905. B.M.Add.MSS 46308.

2 A.K.Russell, The general election of 1906 (Oxford D.Phil., 1962).

3 Liberal Magazine, XIII (December 1905), p 666. For a detailed study of issues in selected constituencies see G.Jones, National and local issues in politics, 1906-1910 (Sussex Ph.D., 1965).

4 The Times, 1 January, 1906.

provided special leaflets each aimed at a specific category of worker, and each making its appeal in terms of increased wages and greater security of employment. But the T.U.T.R.A. was virtually alone in its interpretation of the electoral issues, and in any case, the tariff reformers were overwhelmingly rejected. This was due partly to the traditional free trade allegiance of many working men, and partly to the fact that an economic recovery set in just as the election got under way. Improved harvests, more settled international relations, and booms on the other side of the Atlantic in cotton and steel, all aided Britain's industrial recovery. In November 1905 the unemployed index had fallen to 4.7%, the first time it had gone below 5.0% since July 1903.[1]

All the other labour organisations published election manifestos, and most of them dealt with unemployment; except, that is, those put out by the S.P.G.B. and the S.L.P., both of which advised the workers to refrain from voting, as all the candidates were advocates of wage slavery.[2] The S.D.F., as befitted its past record, stressed unemployment, and Justice stated that it should be kept to the fore-front of the campaign along with the state maintenance of children and

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1 Table 1.

2 The S.L.P. manifesto appeared in the Socialist, January 1906, p 1. That of the S.P.G.B. was contained in the leaflet, Why vote?, a copy of which survives in the party records. It was decided to distribute 30,000 copies, mainly in south east London. See S.P.G.B., E.C.Minutes, 9 January, 1906.

old age pensions.[1] The circular sent to all London candidates by the L.T.C. asked if they would pledge support for the provision of national funds to work the 1905 Act, and the payment of union wage rates for all work done under its auspices.[2] The T.U.C. asked voters to support candidates who were in favour of amending the Act, and also those who wished working hours to be reduced in order to lessen unemployment.[3]

Individual labour candidates' programmes were very diverse as far as unemployment remedies were concerned, and many of them were barely discernible from those of Liberal radicals. But some generalisations are possible. One is that the Liberal-Labour men were much less inclined to emphasise unemployment than were the L.R.C. candidates, perhaps because they shared the same sense of priorities as the majority of Liberals. Thus Thomas Burt and Havelock-Wilson did not mention it at all, while Henry Vivian, who contested Birkenhead, placed it tenth in a list of twelve points. On the other hand, eighteen of the L.R.C. and socialist candidates gave it first or second place - Clynes, Lansbury, Barnes, Smillie, Hill,

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1 Justice, 2 December, 1905.

2 L.T.C., Annual Report, 1905, p 6.

3 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1906, p 50.

Hudson, Newlove, Wardle, Shackleton, Kelley, Proctor, T.F.Richards, O'Grady, Fox, Stuart, Hobson, Rose and Belt. Nearly all of these were socialists, while Barnes, Rose and Lansbury were all members of the National Right to Work Council.

The great variety of solutions offered by the labour candidates differed in emphasis rather than in principle. Although they ranged from the co-operative organisation of unemployed labour, advocated by five of the eight S.D.F. candidates, to the idea of a ministry of labour, supported by Bowerman, Hill, and Macpherson, nearly all wanted a solution on national lines. For some, this took the form of suggested amendments to the 1905 Act. Fifteen of the L.R.C. men and six others suggested schemes of afforestation, land colonisation, and foreshore reclamation. In a few cases this desire for a national approach was expressed in a demand for the "right to work." Surprisingly, John Ward, one of the Lib-Labs, was one who supported this essentially socialistic proposal.

There appears to have been no correlation between the position afforded to unemployment in the programme and the result of a particular contest. Of the eighteen who gave it a high priority, only eight were elected.[1] Similarly, there seems to have been no

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[1] Clynes, Barnes, Hudson, Wardle, Kelley, T.F.Richards, and O'Grady.

coincidence between the solutions offered and the result, or between the incidence of unemployment in a particular constituency and the election outcome. For example, John Ward won a seat at Stoke offering the "right to work", while S.G.Hobson, who also offered it was beaten at Rochdale. John Johnson of the I.L.P. won Gateshead, where unemployment had been comparatively light, while Frank Rose of the National Right to Work Council lost at Stockton, another town where unemployment had not been too bad.[1] In Middlesborough, scene of an L.R.C. demonstration in the summer of 1905, George Lansbury, advocating two different ways of tackling the problem, was defeated by J.Havelock Wilson, who didn't mention it at all. This would seem to confirm Russell's conclusion that unemployment was not very significant in the election, and probably serves to emphasise that local issues, which obviously varied from constituency to constituency, played an important part in Edwardian elections.[2]

The diversity of suggestions put forward by the labour candidates may indicate that, despite the 1905 conference on unemployment, the Labour Party had no clear idea of what it intended

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1 Gateshead and Stockton were mainly iron and engineering towns. Gateshead's iron trade had prospered since May 1905, Stockton's since October. See F.S.I., Monthly Reports, 1905, passim. Engineering in the north east was generally flourishing by December. See Board of Trade, Labour Gazette, December 1905, p 353.

2 This analysis is based on Table 2. For the importance of local issues see Jones, National and local issues.

to try and secure for the unemployed beyond pressing for a national approach. This lack of a clearly defined policy was reflected to some extent in the rather vague statements of labour leaders as to the party's future intentions. Will Crooks said merely that the matter would be taken up.[1] The general secretary of the boiler-makers, Cummings, was even vaguer, expressing the view that the hope of good work on behalf of labour was greater than ever before, an opinion shared by the secretary of the cotton spinners.[2] The L.T.C. placed unemployment third in a list of subjects which it expected the Labour Party to tackle in the near future, but gave no indication as to how it might be done.[3] Only Alexander Wilkie and Hardie were more specific, the former saying that every effort would be made to amend the 1905 Act to secure productive work for the unemployed at decent wages.[4] Hardie said that they would try to force the government to set up national works of the type he had long been advocating.[5]

These generally uncertain prophecies contrasted strangely with

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1 W.Crooks, "The prospects and programme of the Labour Party", National Review, XLV (January 1906), p 627.

2 U.S.B.I.S.S., Annual Report, 1905, p vii : A.S.O.C.S., Quarterly Report, January 1906, p 4.

3 L.S.C., Annual Report, 1905, p 44.

4 A.S.S., Annual Report, 1905, pp vi-vii.

5 J.K.Hardie, "The Labour Party", National Review, XLVI (February 1906), pp 999-1008.

the views of the press, which apparently knew exactly what the Labour Party would do with its new found power. The Standard expected that it would compel the provision of work at the public expense, which would pauperise many people.[1] Another intepreted the relaxation of the regulations of the Unemployed Workmen Act as the first concession to socialist pressure, and hoped that there would be no more.[2] The Daily Mail claimed that the Labour Party would advocate socialism right from the start of the session because it was pushed on by the unemployed.[3]

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Although the number of unemployed was still falling, and even though agitation had naturally declined during the fever of the election campaign, it had not ceased entirely. Sixty Edmonton unemployed, for example, had been arrested for begging without the necessary permit.[4] On 19 January Jack Williams, defeated in the election at Northampton, re-commenced his meetings at Tower Hill on behalf of the C.W.C., which was determined to turn the many Liberal expressions of sympathy for the unemployed, which had been made

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1 Standard, 19 January, 1906.

2 Daily Graphic, 1 February, 1906.

3 Daily Mail, 20 January, 1906.

4 Trades and Labour Gazette, January 1906, p 4.

during the election campaign, into something more concrete. But it was still hampered by financial problems, in spite of the adherence of some twenty local committees by the beginning of January. It was necessary to make a special appeal for funds to finance the demonstration which it was planned to hold on the eve of the opening of parliament in conjunction with the National Right to Work Council. By the end of January exactly £60 had been contributed for this purpose - £1 from the N.A.F.T.A., 10/- from the O.B.S., 5/- from the G.U.C.J., and £25 from the S.D.F.[1] These organisations were the only important ones to make donations, which suggests again that most were willing to wait and give the government a chance. It was to this that Quelch attributed that fact that the demonstration was not as well attended as those held in previous years.[2] Almost its only outcome was a telegram from Campbell Bannerman in reply to the C.W.C. communication, saying that the government was still considering its policy.

During the election campaign Liberal candidates, while frequently sympathetic, had often been rather imprecise when it came to actually

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1 Trades and Labour Gazette, January 1906, p 16.

2 Justice, 17 February, 1906.

stating just what was to be done for the unemployed. Generally, those who did have any constructive suggestions, were advocates of land reforms.[1] There was some pressure from the radical wing of the party for national machinery to be created, or even for the restoration of the original bill of 1905. After the election this group was augmented by newcomers, such as Alden and G.P.Gooch, as well as C.F.G.Masterman.[2] But even by the beginning of 1906 it seems that the government had not definitely made up its mind to introduce any measure dealing with unemployment. The Prime Minister told Asquith that "two sops for labour", a Trades Disputes Bill and a Workmens' Compensation Bill, should be sufficient.[3] Reginald McKenna thought that the Education Bill would take up so much time that there would be no time for any labour measures other than trade disputes.[4] On the other hand, Lord Ripon felt that the question had to be tackled in the first session and wrote to Burns to tell him so, asking when the cabinet unemployment committee was going to meet.[5] The

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1 For an analysis of Liberal social policy at this time see J.Brown, Ideas affecting social legislation, 1906-1911 (London Ph.D., 1964), pp 120-225.

2 See, for example, C.F.G.Masterman, "The unemployed", Contemporary Review, LXXXIX (January 1906), pp 106-20; G.P.Gooch, "The unemployed", ibid., LXXXIX (February 1906), pp 267-73.

3 H.Campbell Bannerman to H.H.Asquith, 21 January, 1906. Asquith Papers. Vol 10, f 200.

4 R.McKenna to C.Dilke, 20 December, 1905. Dilke Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 43918, f 149.

5 Lord Ripon to J.Burns, 29 January, 1906. Burns Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 46299, f 39.

committee in fact met on 1 February and according to Burns' diary, "settled policy."[1] The policy on which the cabinet committee decided was apparently an amendment of the existing Unemployed Act, for Beatrice Webb recorded in her diary that, shortly after Burns had met with his civil servants on 2 February, he went to see her.

> 'He pulled out a set of cards, upon which he had written the measures which he had decided to bring forward in the first two years . . . and finally "as a concession to the Labour Party" an Amendment to the Unemployed Act in the direction of greater contributions from the rates.' [2]

Further light is thrown on this projected measure by a letter written by Campbell Bannerman to Lord Knollys, when the King asked for more details about it. "It will have some of the features of the original Bill of last year . . . but it is not yet settled."[3]

Thus when the Royal Speech was read to the house of commons on 19 February, it contained the announcement that the Unemployed Workmen Act would be amended, although no details were given.[4] It evoked a delighted response from Hardie, but the labour press was more cautious, the Labour Leader warning that experience had shown

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1 Burns Diaries, 1 February, 1906. B.M.Add.MSS 46324.

2 B.Webb Diaries, 9 February, 1906. Passfield Papers. I,1, Vol 25.

3 H.Campbell Bannerman to Lord Knollys, 13 February, 1906. Campbell Bannerman Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 41207, ff 50-1.

4 Hansard, 4th Series, CLII, 198. 19 February, 1906.

there was often a gap between promise and performance.[1] In March Frank Smith wrote to The Times stating that the existence of a Liberal Government was not, as many people seemed to think, in itself the answer to unemployment.[2] Two days after Smith's letter was published, Will Thorne asked Burns when the amending bill was to be introduced and was told that as yet no date had been fixed.[3] A month went by, during which time the C.W.C. successfully protested against the cessation of work by the distress committees, which were instructed to work for a little longer.[4] On 10 April Burns again refused to name a day for the introduction of the bill, and in the Easter adjournment debate the Labour M.P.'s raised the matter again, but still unsuccessfully.[5]

On 21 April The Times announced that the C.W.C. and the Right to Work Council had decided to hold a demonstration of protest at the government's delay in bringing in the bill.[6] To this end Knee, Lansbury and Smith issued a joint appeal for food and money, necessary because the C.W.C. was again in financial difficulties. Knee had

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1 Labour Leader, 23 February, 1906.

2 The Times, 12 March, 1906.

3 Hansard, 4th Series, CLIII, 1229. 14 March, 1906.

4 Justice, 17 March, 1906.

5 Hansard, 4th Series, CLC, 1364. 11 April, 1906.

6 The Times, 21 April, 1906.

already had to re-issue his plea for funds to support Williams, and when the C.W.C. executive met on 25 March Quelch said that their financial hardship was due to the failure of the unions to support their work. Harry Gosling moved that all unions and members be urged to help the committee clear its debts.[1] Since the previous January only £23-14-0 had been received.[2] Trade unionists, however, were apparently unwilling to spend very much on unemployment in a time of prosperity. April 25 saw the joint board sub-committee on unemployment decide that "no inquiry incurring considerable expense be entered upon."[3]

On 8 May the Prime Minister refused to see a small deputation from the Right to Work Council, and it was decided to go ahead with the plans for the demonstration. But it was not very successful, despite the attempts of Justice to play it up. Some of the speeches were very violent in tone, demanding that the 1905 Act be amended, and the editor of Justice was annoyed that only four M.P.'s, Hardie, Barnes, Seddon, and Thorne, bothered to turn up.[4] Frank Smith was angry because nothing was done to follow up the demonstration, and

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1 The Times, 26 March, 1906.

2 Trades and Labour Gazette, February 1906, p 9.

3 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 25 April, 1906.

4 Justice, 19 May, 1906.

his anger suggests a real division between those members of the Right to Work Council who were M.P.'s and those who were not. The Labour members, even Hardie and Barnes, were unwilling to concentrate their energies entirely on the unemployment question, especially at a time when the economy was booming, at the expense of ignoring all the other spheres in which the party could be influential. Smith, who was the permanent secretary of the council and thus always involved in the problems of the unemployed, could not understand this. There had been other signs of dissensions within the "right to work" movement as long ago as January when the Liverpool Right to Work Committee, headed by R.J.Gibbon, had demanded a more vigorous policy that that of holding one solitary demonstration in London. He had advocated a series of marches on the capital and had won some support from the Northampton branches of the S.D.F.[1] He did in fact undertake such a march from Liverpool but got no practical support, and when he arrived in London with his 150 followers he was forced to turn to the Salvation Army for help.

By May 1906 the situation must have begun to appear in labour eyes ominously like that of the previous summer, with the government resisting pressure to introduce a measure promised in the King's

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1 Justice, 24 January, 1906.

Speech. Strangely, the reason for the Liberals' delay seems to have been, as in 1905, internal divisions over the line of action to be followed. As early as March Justice had referred to rumours of ministerial splits, and on 12 May Burns' diary contained the following oddly punctuated entry.[1] "I do not like the Unemployed Bill to amend it is to extend the virtue of pauperised dependency and to inflict I am afraid a serious blow on the morale of the labourers . . . presumably I am for resignation."[2] This was preceded by the comment that only his concern for the cabinet and the government was preventing him from resigning. Burns had never liked the idea of a rate contribution- this was why he had opposed the original bill of 1905, and in spite of Beatrice Webb's comment that greater rate aid was to be the content of the government's new bill, this had not been definitely settled by the time parliament opened. After 13 February unemployment was not discussed in a full cabinet meeting until 27 June. Was Burns playing for time, hoping that the Act would prove to be a complete failure which would release him from the obligation to legislate using it as a basis? Or did he all along want to provide

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1 Justice, 24 March, 1906.

2 Burns Diaries, 12 May, 1906. B.M.Add.MSS 46324.

government money over which he could retain firm control? Or was he just entirely devoid of ideas and in the control of the reactionary officials at the Local Government Board? The answer must remain a matter for conjecture. Certainly if he was hoping that the Act would prove a failure he must have been encouraged when the Glasgow Distress Committee condemned it as useless after only a few weeks, and the St.Pancras Committee found the central body far too slow in finding work for the applicants it recommended.[1] Mrs. Montefiore, who served on the Hammersmith Distress Committee, later recorded her impressions of it.

> ' . . . it seemed to me that the men who had formulated all unemployed schemes had veritably tried how not to do things. Long lists of men out of work were put before us week after week, and name after name was struck out as not being eligible.' [2]

But the attacks made on the Act by the authorities responsible for its administration soon became a pressure for the government to do something for the unemployed. The C.U.B. expressed profound regret when Burns refused to meet a deputation of London unemployed, and later in the same month the body's chairman wrote to the press

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1 Justice, 10 February, 1906.

2 D.B.Montefiore, From a Victorian to a modern (London, 1927), p 59.

appealing for everyone to give the proposed measure the fullest possible support, and the earliest possible passage through parliament.[1] At its annual meeting in June the Association of Municipal Corporations declared the Act unworkable in its current form.[2]

Pressure was also being put on Burns from inside the house of commons. The Labour Party, stimulated by Frank Smith, who, exasperated by the party's inaction, wrote to MacDonald asking him to call a Labour members' meeting to discuss what could be done, put down a series of questions in the house.[3] They were asked by O'Grady on 23 May, Clynes on 24 May, Thorne on 28 May, and Hardie on 30 May. During the debate at the Whitsun adjournment Crooks joined Hardie and Thorne in protesting against the government's failure to redeem its promises.[4] In the evening after this debate Henderson, Shackleton, and MacDonald presented Campbell Bannerman with a memorandum asking for a clear statement of the government's intentions. It had been signed by 115 Liberal and Labour members, which suggests considerable discontent with Burns on the part of Liberal backbenchers.[5] Indeed,

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1 The Times, 26 June, 1906.

2 Ibid., 15 June, 1906.

3 See Smith's letter to the I.L.P. branches, a copy of which survives in the Watford I.L.P., Correspondence File, No 1, f 37. 16 May, 1906.

4 Hansard, 4th Series, CLVIII, 454-466. 30 May, 1906.

5 The Times, 31 May, 1906.

only a few days before, Masterman had taken a deputation of Liberal members to see Burns to ask that he take immediate action on the unemployment question.[1]

By 27 May Burns had come to see that something had to be done, as Buxton told Lord Ripon.

> 'H.Gladstone agrees with us on an exchequer grant to tide the matter over temporarily . . . . It is, I think, for the best temporary solution; and as Burns now proposes it himself it is a great thing gained to get him to . . . do something- it seems to me absolutely essential in view of the coming winter . . . .' 2

It seems clear from the tone of this letter and also from Ripon's reply that the members of the cabinet committee had also been putting pressure on Burns.

> 'It would be most foolish and even dangerous for the Government not to make provision before Parliament is prorogued for a possible want of employment next winter. I care little how it is done, but done it must be or we shall run a very serious risk.' 3

Even now there still seems to have been disagreement within the cabinet, for when the exchequer grant was discussed on 27 June Burns

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1 See Burns Diaries, 24 May, 1906. B.M.Add.MSS 46324.

2 S.Buxton to Lord Ripon, 27 May, 1906. Ripon Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 43555, f 255.

3 Lord Ripon to S.Buxton, 28 May, 1906. Buxton Papers.

"put my view, got my way."[1] The following day Campbell Bannerman announced that Burns would make a full statement on 19 July.[2]

This was too late, however, to prevent popular discontent manifesting itself in July, spilling over into August and September, and providing yet another parallel with 1905. The unemployed in Manchester, tired of the inability or unwillingness of the national movements or the local authorities to secure any action from the government, beyond statements of future intent, seized a piece of church land and began to cultivate it. They were led by a man named Smith, who had been one of the ring leaders arrested in 1905 after the riot in Albert Square, and who now declared that "this is the first battle ground of a movement that will go down in history."[3] His aim, he told a representative of Justice, was to draw public attention to the plight of the unemployed, to dispose of the popular idea that all unemployed men were lazy, and to show the immorality of keeping idle land, which was the basic source of the necessities of life.[4] The S.D.F., perhaps impressed by Smith's predictions, but

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1 Burns Diaries, 27 June, 1906. B.M.Add.MSS 46324.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CLIX, 1158. 28 June, 1906.

3 Reynold's Newspaper, 8 July, 1906.

4 Justice, 21 July, 1906.

always eager to jump onto any likely bandwagon of popular discontent, sent Jack Williams to take charge of the Manchester men and he, with characteristic panache, dispatched a telegram to Burns. "Manchester's unemployed have taken your advice of twenty years ago, and have gone back to the land for food for wives and bairns. Congratulate us."[1] Encouraged by his success, Smith next occupied a piece of land near Salford but he was swiftly evicted by the owner. Williams, having established the Manchester men to his satisfaction, moved on to the "Triangle Camp", which had been set up by Councillor Ben Cunningham of the S.D.F. on a piece of land belonging to the West Ham Town Council at Plaistow. This camp was short-lived, however, for Cunningham and his friends were evicted on 4 August after a short struggle with the police, and his subsequent attempt to re-occupy the land led to his appearance in court. At Leeds the "Libertarian Camp" only lasted for three days before a gang of hooligans broke in, turned out the occupants, and burned down the tents.[2] Perhaps the most successful of all was the camp organised by Albert Glyde of the I.L.P. on some land belonging to the Midland Railway Company near Bradford. By 25 August he estimated, probably very liberally, that 25,000

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1 Reynold's Newspaper, 15 July, 1906.

2 The Times, 17 August, 1906.

visitors had been to the camp, and that over £50 had been raised by the sale of postcards and of the produce which the men had grown.[1]

But all too soon for some these experiments in communalism came to an end as the various landowners asserted their rights and turned off their uninvited guests. The general reaction had been one of tolerant amusement, although some, such as Rider Haggard, had been sufficiently alarmed to write to Cunningham expressing the hope that "you and your friends will give up this land grabbing business, for I am sure that in the long run such violent measures cannot do the unemployed any good."[2] Will Thorne did not feel that land grabbing was a valid solution, but thought that it might compel the government to act, if it was adopted on a wide enough scale.[3] It is an interesting indication of how radical the Right to Work Council was, when compared with the old N.U.C., that it recommended land grabbing to all who were out of work.[4] Not all socialists agreed with the policy, however, which may explain - in addition to the risks of prosecution by irate land owners - why the movement died out so

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1 Trades and Labour Gazette, September 1906, p 18.

2 The Times, 5 September, 1906.

3 Reynold's Newspaper, 2 July, 1906.

4 Labour Leader, 3 August, 1906.

rapidly and failed to fulfill Smith's hopes. Arthur Hayday was one socialist who considered the whole idea ill thought out.[1]

Halfway through these escapades came the long awaited government statement on unemployment. Burns commenced his speech on 19 July with a survey of the current problem and asserted that as unemployment had many causes, so it had many solutions. This was why, he went on, the government had decided to do nothing new until the report of the poor law commission came out. In the meantime £200,000 was to be provided for the Unemployed Workmen Act, the money to be controlled by the Local Government Board. This, combined with rate money and voluntary subscriptions, would mean that between £3-400,000 was available to work the Act. In addition, legislation on small-holdings, crofters, and the army, all to be introduced shortly, would also aid the unemployed situation.

Ramsay MacDonald accepted this statement on behalf of the Labour Party, offering full support to the government. This provoked severe criticism from some of his colleagues, especially Will Thorne, because there had been no party meeting at which MacDonald had been given such instructions.[2] Thus very early in his parliamentary career did

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1 See his letter to the Daily Telegraph, 16 July, 1906.

2 N.U.G.W. & G.L., E.C.Minutes, 11 August, 1906.

MacDonald's pragmatism show itself at the expense of his party. But it seems that his attitude fairly represented that of the majority of the Labour M.P.'s. Will Crooks said that he approved of the government statement, and George Roberts was pleased because it indicated that the government was moving in the right direction.[1] The labour press was not so enthusiastic, the Labour Leader suggesting that the Labour M.P.'s had been "more than generous in their acceptance of Mr. John Burns' statement . . . ."[2] Justice condemned the grant as a "contemptible measure to bulk the unemployed . . . introduced by a contemptible man in a contemptible way."[3] But it does seem that labour only accepted the grant on the assumption that it was a temporary measure. This explains why it was accepted so readily and why the Labour Party was so angry when no further measures were announced at the beginning of 1907. For example, the A.S.R.S. conference approved of the £200,000 as "an instalment of what we anticipate in the near future."[4] The editor of the engineers' Monthly Journal hoped for legislation in the coming session, seeing

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1 For the debate see Hansard, 4th Series, CLXI, 419-64. 19 July, 1906.

2 Labour Leader, 27 July, 1906.

3 Justice, 4 August, 1906.

4 The Times, 6 October, 1906.

the money as a stop gap.[1] A similar feeling was expressed at the T.U.C. conference in September when it was reported that although the amount was quite inadequate, there was hope because this was the first time that a government had made a national contribution to help the unemployed.[2]

This exchequer grant was not the only innovation made in the course of 1906, although it was the only one sponsored by the government. In March William Beveridge had begun his campaign for the adoption of labour bureaux by the London distress committee to supplement and expand the 1902 Act. The joint board of the labour movement, ever mindful of union interests, decided to encourage the bureaux but only on certain conditions, namely; that no preference was given to non-union men; that no black legs were supplied by the bureaux during industrial disputes; that no work was offered at less than union rates and conditions; and that certain safeguards were included in the administrative machinery.[3] A resolution to this effect was moved at the T.U.C. conference by W.Appleton of the

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1 A.S.E., Monthly Journal, August 1906, pp 5-6. See the similar comments of Henderson in F.S.I., Annual Report, 1906, p 9: and of Wilkie in A.S.S., Quarterly Report, December 1906, p 12.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1906, p 67.

3 G.F.T.U., M.C.Minutes, 1 September, 1906. In G.F.T.U., Proceedings and Reports, 1906-1907.

G.F.T.U. and passed unanimously, the conditions then being embodied in a circular which the joint board distributed to all labour organisations, asking them to contact the authority responsible for running any local exchanges to ensure that the conditions were being observed.[1] Difficulties were obviously encountered however, for in November Beveridge told his mother that "the employment exchanges are in a critical position between being accepted and being violently opposed by trade unions."[2]

But generally, the onset of a period of prosperous international trade, particularly in iron, coal, and cotton, which sent the domestic unemployed index down to 3.6% in July, promoted apathy among trade unionists as far as unemployment was concerned.[3] So complacent did they become that no unemployment resolution was submitted to the 1906 T.U.C., and the parliamentary committee had to formulate one itself.[4] This is not to suggest, of course, that the problem no longer existed. The official index was not a very accurate guide, as witness the activities of the land grabbers during the summer. For some unions, too, it remained acute, particularly in

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1906, p 178.

2 W.H.Beveridge to his mother, 23 November, 1906. Beveridge Papers. L, 1, 204.

3 Table 1.

4 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 13 June, 1906.

the building industry where there grew up a demand for union unemployment funds to be subsidised with government money.[1] This actually came to the attention of the T.U.C. parliamentary committee in November when Percy Alden wrote inquiring about the T.U.C.'s view of such a demand. Shackleton and Barnes were deputed to see him and explain that as yet the matter had not been discussed by congress.[2]

It was in this general atmosphere of complacency, however, that the last few months of 1906 slipped away, although the national attention was rivetted firmly on the struggle for the Education Bill. Slight disturbances in Poplar and Fulham were the only signs of unemployed discontent. In the commons a few questions were asked about the distribution of the government grant. By and large, the unions had lost interest in unemployment and were satisfied with the Labour Party's parliamentary performance. After all, a radical Trades Disputes Bill had been secured, as well as the Workmens' Compensation Bill, and the £200,000 must have seemed like a luxurious

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1 See, for example, **D.B.S.**, Trade Circular and General Reporter, August 1906, pp 19-20: A.S.C.J., Monthly Report, July 1906, pp 411-12: ibid., September 1906, p 529: ibid., November 1906, p 652.

2 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 21 November, 1906.

extra. Only the socialists continued to threaten. Clynes told his constituents at Manchester that the grant had only begun the process of dealing with the unemployed question.[1] Justice was rude about union apathy, and labelled the Labour Party's attitude to the question as "disastrous."[2] James Macdonald called the government grant and its acceptance by the Labour Party "the fiasco of the session."[3] Indicative of a growing division between the S.D.F. and the Labour Party was the opinion of Bruce Glasier that the "Labour Party . . . has done exceedingly well."[4]

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1 Labour Leader, 28 September, 1906.

2 Justice, 6 October, 1906.

3 Trades and Labour Gazette, January 1907, p 10.

4 Labour Leader, 28 December, 1906. Satisfaction with the party's efforts was also expressed by several union reports. It is worth noting that the list includes three of the largest general unions, two printing unions, and the furniture trades union, all very susceptible to unemployment. See
N.A.F.T.A., Annual Report, 1906, pp 1-13.
A.S.E., Annual Report, 1906, pp v-ix.
N.S.A.B., Annual Report, 1906, p 3.
D.W.R.G.W.U., Annual Report, 1906, p 5.
N.A.U.L., Annual Report, 1906, pp 4-5.
A.S.L.P., Half Yearly Report, December 1906, p 5.
Typographical Association, Half Yearly Report, December 1906, p 4.
N.U.D.L., Annual Report, 1906, p 10.
A.S.O.C.S., Annual Report, 1906, p 3.

Chapter 4. The End of the Boom.

Although as far as most trade unionists were concerned the employment situation was generally satisfactory at the end of 1906, there were still isolated pockets where unemployment and agitation persisted, usually among casual workers and unskilled labourers. In Edinburgh, for example, the local Right to Work Committee was successful in forcing the town council to hold a special meeting in order to consider the needs of the unemployed.[1] The refusal of the Fulham Guardians to provide adequate outdoor relief provoked a protest march on the local Methodist Church, although no-one seems to have known just what this was meant to achieve.[2] A series of street marches organised by the S.D.F. in Brighton raised over £170.[3] But the general mood of labour was a passive one, much to the disgust of Justice, which claimed that this quietness would cause the unemployed question to be forgotten.[4]

This general sense of well being may well explain why the T.U.C. and the G.F.T.U. both turned down a suggestion from the L.T.C. that a

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1 Trades and Labour Gazette, February 1907, p 7.

2 Labour Record and Review, January 1907, p 261.

3 Justice, 2 February, 1907.

4 Ibid. See the similar fears expressed in the Social Democrat, XI (January 1907), p 5: ibid., XI (February 1907), pp 68-9.

demonstration of those still in work be held to draw attention to the continuance of unemployment in London. The evidence of past years indicates that trade unionists were only interested in direct action of this sort when they themselves were badly affected by unemployment, and the majority seem to have been suspicious of socialists' motives. The T.U.C. referred the matter to the joint board, instructing its representatives to vote against the proposal.[1] The General Federation also referred the L.T.C. letter to the joint board, ordering its delegates to press for a national rather than a London demonstration, thus effectively killing it for the time being.[2] The idea was also being mooted, however, by the S.D.F., which wished to hold a demonstration to coincide with the re-assembling of parliament. On 2 February an appeal was made for funds to finance a crash programme of meetings to be addressed on Tower Hill by Jack Williams.[3] This culminated with a mass gathering on 11 February made possible by Lady Warwick, whose contribution of £15 provided van loads of sandwiches for the hungry unemployed. It was indicative of the comparatively healthy state of the economy that only 1500 men turned up, and it is

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1 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 12 February, 1907.

2 G.F.T.U., M.C.Minutes, 7 February, 1907. In G.F.T.U., Proceedings and Reports, 1906-1907.

3 Justice, 2 February, 1907.

not irrelevant to ask how many of them were attracted by the promise of free food, rather than of parliamentary action?[1]

The reluctance of the union organisations to support a demonstration was not based only on the favourable economic situation. It also owed something to the general labour expectation that the government would announce an unemployed programme in the Royal Speech. This had existed from the time that Burns had announced the exchequer grant the previous summer, and was summed up by Clynes.

> 'The £200,000 granted last year was surely not given in place of an amendment of the Act. He and his friends at least took it not as a sum which was to replace legislation, but as a sum to aid for some time pending a drastic amendment of the Unemployed Act in keeping with promises previously made by Ministers of the Crown.'[2]

At the Labour Party conference in January J.Stephenson, the chairman, said that unemployment still remained to be dealt with.[3] In a speech delivered at Swadlincote during the Christmas recess the Labour M.P. for Wolverhampton, T. Richardson, said that he confidently expected the immediate commencement of national relief works as a solution.[4] Hardie, speaking at Gateshead, omitted unemployment from a list of

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1 Justice, 16 February, 1907.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXXI, 1861. 27 March, 1907. See also pp 182-83.

3 Labour Party, Annual Report, 1907, p 44.

4 Labour Leader, 8 February, 1907.

topics which, he said, the Labour Party was intending to tackle in the approaching session - presumably because he was expecting action from the government.[1] Thus when the Labour Party executive met on 11 February to finalise the details of their parliamentary programme, it was decided to ballot for only four bills - an Eight Hour Bill for miners, a School Meals Bill for Scotland, Compulsory Weighing, and a bill dealing with the sweated industries.[2]

Labour's expectation of government action was not shared by the daily press, which had given little attention to the unemployed since 1905, and it was the press which proved the better prophet, for the King's Speech, which dealt almost exclusively with relations between the two houses of parliament, contained no reference to unemployment. Rumours of this omission had already begun to circulate before the Speech was read, because at the S.D.F. demonstration Williams claimed that he had been authorised to say that the I.L.P. was now prepared to make unemployment its first consideration.[3] After the opening of parliament Hardie immediately announced that unemployment and old age pensions, neither of which had been mentioned, would now be the

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1 Labour Record and Review, January 1907, p 248.

2 Labour Party, Quarterly Circular, April 1907.

3 The Times, 12 February, 1907.

subjects which the Labour Party would press in the house of commons.[1] Thus on 22 February Will Thorne, seconded by O'Grady, moved an amendment on the King's Speech expressing regret at the failure to mention unemployment, saying that "the organised workers were very much disappointed with the Government because they were not promised any legislation this session."[2] Burns took the opportunity to indulge in self congratulation on his administration of the 1905 Act. "I am not asking for testimonials . . . I never do . . . but . . . I have been as reasonable and prompt as could be expected. . . I have done all that man could be asked to do."[3] The amendment was defeated 207-47, and it was significant that three Labour trade unionists, Hall, Wadsworth, and Nicholls all voted with the government, as well as Fenwick and Cremer. On the other hand, the fact that the government put on the whips may suggest that it was aware that the failure to bring forward any suggestions for tackling the unemployment problem would rouse some opposition from its own back-benchers, many of whom had pledged themselves to some solution during the election campaign

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1 Labour Leader, 15 February, 1907.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXIX, 925. 20 February, 1907.

3 Ibid., 956.

of 1906.[1]

The Labour Party wasted little time in implementing Hardie's promise and on 5 March the joint board met and decided that unemployment needed to be discussed urgently. That it did not meet before this date again points to the fact that the labour leaders had been expecting a statement from the government. A little preliminary work had been carried out the previous year by the joint board sub-committee on unemployment, which had tabulated information received in reply to a circular of 25 questions about the composition and efficiency of the distress committees, and had concluded that the 1905 Act would help no-one who was provident, efficient, and organised.[2] With this information on which to work the joint board appointed two new sub-committees to draft further reports and recommendations for a new bill on unemployment. Hardie, MacDonald, Steadman, and Ward were charged with the task of compiling the political section, Gill, Curran, Hudson, and Mitchell of drafting the economic sections.[3]

The determination to produce this bill must have been increased

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1 For the debate see Hansard, 4th Series, CLXIX, 923-69. 20 February, 1907.

2 This circular survives in the Infancy of the Labour Party, II, p 27. 11 May, 1906.

3 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1907, p 116.

when Burns, in reply to a question from Roberts, said that he could make no statement about any possible renewal of the exchequer grant in 1907 and emphasised that he had no intention of amending the Unemployed Workmen Act.[1] He remained obdurate in the face of a rising tide of criticism of his administration of both the 1905 Act and the money. Many workers were annoyed by the petty nature of many of the regulations which he had added to the original Act, and Hardie claimed that he had hedged the grant round with so many restrictions as to make it virtually useless.[2] A similar criticism was implicit in MacDonald's assertion, made at the I.L.P. conference in April, that with a sympathetic administration the Act "could be made a most valuable instrument."[3] As late as September the L.T.C. was still trying to secure the abolition of the regulation which withheld aid from any who had previously received parochial relief, or relief under the Act during the previous two years.[4]

Burns was also attacked for breaking his pledges. He had said, in announcing the exchequer grant in August 1906, that the only

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1 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXXXI, 234. 14 March, 1907.

2 Ibid., CLXIX, 107. 12 February, 1907.

3 I.L.P., Annual Report, 1907, p 53.

4 Trades and Labour Gazette, October 1907, p 4.

condition for its use would be the degree of local distress, but in fact, he had insisted on local subscriptions as well. This accusation was originally made in an editorial article in the Labour Leader and Hardie gave it concrete form during the Easter adjournment debate, citing Burns' refusal to give money to the Newport Distress Committee unless it raised local funds as well.[1] Obviously, said Hardie, the knowledge that the government had set aside a large sum for unemployment relief would lead to a decline of local voluntary contributions.[2]

The reluctance of the Local Government Board to use any of the money to finance important experiments provoked much adverse comment from labour leaders, particularly as Burns had used some of it to aid emigration. Lansbury especially was critical of Burns' refusal to allow the Poplar Guardians to buy the land which Joseph Fels had leased to them in April 1904 with an option to buy after three years.[3] Hardie told the commons that when the Glasgow Distress Committee arranged to buy land worth between £7-8,000 in order to start a farm colony, an arrangement which had been sanctioned by an inspector from

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1 Labour Leader, 1 March, 1907.

2 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXXI, 1859. 27 March, 1907.

3 See his article in Justice, 26 January, 1907.

the Local Government Board, Burns had stepped in at the last moment and stopped the purchase going through, even though the committee was planning to buy the land with money raised locally. Burns gave as his reason the imminence of the poor law report and the expiration of the Unemployed Workmen Act in 1908.[1] They were in fact more devious than this. He had always been opposed to the idea of labour colonies, and after one visit to Hollesley Bay, he condemned it in his diary as "a costly and foolish experiment developed by that prize fanatic G.L. . . . a holiday for 250 men from London . . . a process of coddling . . . ."[2] In his reply to Will Thorne's amendment in February Burns had also made reference to the fact that Hollesley Bay was "soft" on the men, a criticism he applied also to a similar colony near Leeds. This prompted the Leeds L.R.C. to investigate the colony and in March the results were published. The men, it was stated, walked two miles to work each day, for which they were allowed thirty minutes, the place of work being so exposed that they had given up their lunch hours for some weeks past in order to build a shelter from the wind. Food was adequate but not plentiful. For a 48 hour week they were paid 20/- of which 11/- was taken for

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1 Clarion, 29 March, 1907.

2 Burns Diaries, 13 April, 1907. B.M.Add.MSS 46325.

board, 1/- for boots, 6d was kept as a tobacco allowance, and the rest was sent to the man's family. It was not, concluded the report, a very soft life.[1] Burns never understood that the purpose of a farm colony as envisaged by men like Lansbury was to re-train men for future employment on small holdings. They were not meant for use as sophisticated relief works which was how Burns utilised them. Several witnesses to the poor law commission said that they could have been useful had they been properly used.[2]

All this was made much worse in labour eyes by the fact that Burns did not spend all the allocated money, much to the disgust of the Labour M.P.'s who generally had not thought it enough anyway. On 13 March Burns informed the house that any remaining money would be returned to the Treasury on 31 March.[3] A fortnight later he revealed that only £85,395 had actually been spent, although more had been allocated, and this admission was taken up by Hardie during the Easter adjournment debate. It was incomprehensible, said Hardie, that Burns had persistently refused to give money to the unemployed womens' workrooms in London when so much money was left.[4] Some

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1 Justice, 23 March, 1907.

2 These included Mrs.Ramsay MacDonald, Fred Hughes of the Birmingham Socialist Centre, and J.Gossip of the furniture trades union. Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, Appendix VIII (Cd. 5066). British Parliamentary Papers, 1910, XLVIII, pp 240-367.

3 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXXI, 36-7. 13 March, 1907.

4 Ibid., 1860. 27 March, 1907. The amount he actually spent was £124,022. See ibid., CLXXIV, 980. 15 May, 1907.

Social Democrats had already commented on the fact that the C.U.B. had had to issue a public appeal for funds in February even though so much money was still available.[1]

It should not be thought, however, that the criticism came only from labour. At a meeting of the C.U.B. in April the chairman expressed disappointment that Hollesley Bay was being mis-used by Burns.[2] W.H.Beveridge wrote that by 1907 all those involved in administering the Act felt "growing hopelessness."[3] At the end of November 1906, 31 distress committees had protested against Burns' announcement that he would only consider the claims of 23 chosen distress committees for donations from the exchequer grant, and he had been compelled to reconsider this decision.[4] L.Bradshaw, who was a member of the Kettering Distress Committee, accused the Liberal Government, and thus by implication Burns, of drugging the public interest with the grant.[5]

By the beginning of June both the T.U.C. and the G.F.T.U. had endorsed the reports of the joint board's sub-committees and on 4

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1 *Justice*, 2 March, 1907.

2 *Ibid.*, 13 April, 1907.

3 W.H.Beveridge, "Labour exchanges and unemployment", *Economic Journal*, XVII (March 1907), p 80.

4 Newcastle Distress Committee, *Annual Report*, 1907, p 6.

5 Bradshaw, *How to avoid the red peril*, p 10.

June the joint board accepted them, deciding that a composite report should be forwarded to the Labour members and the trade union group for preparation as a bill to be introduced in the commons.[1] This report, after surveying the general problem of poverty, stated that unemployment should be attacked in two ways. One was to try to secure the maximum number of workmen to perform such work as was required, the other was to increase the volume of available work, where advantageous to do so, in order to absorb surplus labour. The first was to be achieved by minimising fluctuations in the demand for labour by making time rather than manpower the elastic element in the labour-employment syndrome. The report further urged all unions to make it official policy to abolish overtime or to restrict it as much as possible. In times of depression a short time working system was advocated instead of men being dismissed.[2]

The T.U.C. in fact had already given this question some thought and arranged overtime conferences in accordance with the resolution passed at the Liverpool congress in 1906. The first of these had been held in March 1907, for workers engaged in engineering and ship-

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1 Infancy of the Labour Party, II, 50. 4 June, 1907.

2 G.F.T.U., Annual Report, 1907, pp 15-7.

building, and the 40 delegates had represented some 350,000 men employed in these trades. They showed themselves keen to tackle unemployment by restricting overtime but there were, as an observer from the N.A.U.L. pointed out, many practical difficulties.[1] In June a second conference was held, this time for building trade workers, and it passed similar resolutions dealing with the standard of wages, the legal restriction of overtime, and with the need to establish a committee to co-ordinate efforts on these lines within the industry.[2] As unemployment rose again some unions acted upon the conference's recommendations and both the N.U.O.C.J. and the O.B.S. appealed to their members to stop working overtime.[3] At Christmas the T.U.C. issued a circular stating that as prospects for the winter were very bad every effort should be made to limit the working of excessive overtime. If this was not possible "we . . . respectfully urge that . . . it be restricted to the narrowest limits and be penalised to the fullest extent."[4]

The second recommendation of the joint board unemployment report -

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1 N.A.U.L., Quarterly Report, 30 March, 1907.

2 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1907, pp 111-13.

3 N.U.O.C.J., Monthly Report, June 1907, p 7: O.B.S., M.D.C.Quarterly Report, September 1907, p 2.

4 T.U.C., Overtime circular, 23 December, 1907.

that the volume of work should be increased where possible - was to be the function of the bill which the parliamentary group was to prepare, but drawing it up was not without its difficulties. Will Thorne was against the inclusion of a clause penalising those who refused work offered under the projected scheme, fearing that it would be harshly interpreted by middle class administrators, but he was over-ruled and on 9 July Ramsay MacDonald introduced the bill in the house of commons.[1] It proposed the creation of a central unemployment committee to undertake national works, commissioners to develop and co-ordinate local works, the use of rate money for payment of work done, and it also included the penal clause against which Thorne had protested. The crux of the bill was in clause three which read,

> 'Where a workman has registered himself as unemployed, it shall be the duty of the local unemployment authority to provide work for him in connection with one or other of the schemes herein-after provided, or otherwise, or failing the provision of work, to provide maintenance should necessity exist for that person and for those depending on that person for the necessaries of life.' [2]

Reaction to the bill was predictable. Burns thought it a prescription

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1 Labour Party, Annual Report, 1908, pp 89-91.

2 Bill No. 273. 7 Edw 7. "A Bill to provide Work through Public Authorities for Unemployed Persons." Ordered to be printed 9 July, 1907.

for "universal pauperism."[1] The C.O.S. later claimed that no thought had been given to the financing of the scheme and thought also that it was wrong for people who were helped not to lose their right to vote.[2] On the other side of the political spectrum the S.P.G.B. asked, in common with many later critics, to what work it was proposed to put the unemployed.[3] The Social Democrats were quite enthusiastic. Although Justice disliked the retention of emigration as one of the methods by which the committees were to help applicants, it thought the measure would be beneficial, though perhaps requiring a socialist President of the Local Government Board to make it fully so.[4] The man who had originally advocated the "right to work", H.Russell Smart, expressed his satisfaction with the bill.[5] The daily press did not comment at all, its attention being completely diverted from the normal run of parliamentary business by the dramatic collapse and death in the house of Sir Alfred Billson, the Liberal member for North Staffs., shortly after MacDonald brought in the Unemployed Bill.

This was unfortunate from the party's point of view, for although

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1 Burns Diaries, 9 July, 1907. B.M.Add.MSS 46325.

2 Charity Organisation Review, XXII (November 1907), pp 261-62.

3 Socialist Standard, 1 July, 1907.

4 Justice, 20 July, 1907.

5 Labour Leader, 26 July, 1907.

the measure was put down for a second reading on 16 July, there was never any real chance of getting it further discussed. Government business had proceeded very slowly during the first half of 1907, due to the obstructionist tactics of the house of lords, the outpacing of administrative machinery by the size and complexity of the government's programme, and internal difficulties within the cabinet.[1] This had been appreciated by the Labour Party strategists and the Unemployment Bill had been introduced partly so that any weakness could be exposed and remedied, partly so that its principles could be well publicised by means of an intensive winter campaign, in order that it would be familiar when it was re-introduced in 1908, the year when the Unemployed Workmen Act of 1905 expired. It would thus be a ready-made and well understood measure which, it was hoped, the Liberal Government would be compelled to bear in mind when considering what to do when the old Act expired. When parliament met in 1908, said George Roberts, the Labour whip, it was anticipated that every party member would ballot for a day on which to introduce the bill.[2] Richardson said that he expected great opposition because of the controversial nature of the "right to work" clause, and he warned

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1 For a full analysis of these causes see Brown, Ideas affecting social legislation, pp 225 seq.

2 In a speech at Norwich. Labour Leader, 16 August, 1907.

that unless the whole labour movement backed the party campaign the measure would be resisted, obstructed, and finally lost.[1] To support the autumn campaign between 10-20,000 copies of the bill were printed for sale, and it was also printed as an official appendix to the July Quarterly Circular.[2] MacDonald published a pamphlet entitled The new Unemployed Bill of the Labour Party (London, 1907), which explained the deficiencies of the 1905 Act, the poorness of its administration under the Liberals, and detailed the new Right to Work Bill, as it was popularly termed. The idea of an autumn campaign soon caught on and suggestions came in to party headquarters from provincial branches as to its form. For example, the North East Lancashire Federation of the I.L.P. suggested that every socialist member of a trade union should get his union to pass a resolution demanding time in parliament for the bill to be discussed, copies to be sent to the Prime Minister, the Labour Party, and to local M.P.'s.[3]

All through the year the S.D.F., despite its criticism of the Labour Party in other contexts had generally welcomed the hardness of the party's attacks on Burns and the government's inaction over

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1 Labour Leader, 16 August, 1907.

2 Infancy of the Labour Party, II, p 53. 24 July, 1907.

3 Labour Leader, 9 August, 1907.

unemployment, and now a Social Democrat, who signed himself simply "A.P.H.", advocated a militant parliamentary policy to back the Right to Work Bill. Every other measure should be obstructed in parliament, he argued, if the government resisted this attempt to secure the national organisation of the unemployed.[1] Perhaps he had been encouraged by the appearance of some Labour M.P.'s, notably Thorne, O'Grady, Roberts, and Summerbell, at some of Williams' meetings on Tower Hill.[2]

(ii)

In spite of the introduction of the Labour Party's Unemployment Bill and the signs of collapse in the boom which seemed to have made unemployment irrelevant, Burns remained unmoved by the rising unemployment figures and did no more than renew the exchequer grant. Even then he refused to guarrantee that it would all be spent.[3] In public speeches the Labour members kept up constant sniping against his administration, and his obstinacy and growing unpopularity must

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1 Trades and Labour Gazette, July 1907, p 8.

2 See Justice, 30 March, 1907 : S.D.F., Annual Report, 1907, p 17.

3 Hansard, 4th Series, CLXXIX, 1834. 6 August, 1907. The government had brought in a Small-holdings Bill, one of the measures which Burns had mentioned when giving the first grant in 1906. Although it had a good reception from the Labour Leader, 31 May, 1907, it was rarely linked with unemployment. It is significant that at the end of the month following the introduction of this measure, both Hardie and MacDonald castigated the government for failing to do anything for the unemployed. See Labour Leader, 14 June, 1907: ibid., 21 June, 1907.

have alarmed his cabinet colleagues, particularly when two socialists won by-elections at Colne Valley and Jarrow, both victories being due mainly to the candidates' advocacy of the Right to Work Bill.[1] In August Sidney Buxton, fresh from seeing Burns, told Lord Ripon that he had been able to

> 'extract nothing except that "it is all going very well", which it is not (he will lose us all our seats in London if he's not careful) . . . . It is important for us in our autumn speeches and before cabinets begin again to be able to say the Government intends to deal with the matter by Bill in view of the expiring of the Act next year . . . . I also want to get Burns pinned to something.' [2]

Haldane was another who was concerned by Burns' general obstinacy, telling Beatrice Webb that he was "vain and ignorant and in the hands of his officials and (he) opposes everything and talks so much that we find it difficult to get to business . . . ."[3]

By August 1907, the unemployed index, which had remained fairly constant at around 3.6%, began to rise sharply due to the failure of

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1 See the candidates' election addresses in the collection at the National Liberal Club. See also MacDonald's speech introducing the Right to Work Bill in which he attributed Curran's victory at Jarrow to his support of the measure. Hansard, 4th Series, CLXXVII, 1446. 9 July, 1907.

2 S.Buxton to Lord Ripon, 19 August, 1907. Ripon Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 43555, ff 266-67.

3 B.Webb Diaries, 8 October, 1907. Passfield Papers. I,1, Vol 26.

the Indian harvests, a depression in the United States which produced an economic crisis in Japan, all of which upset the delicate structure of international trade. This affected the shipping and cotton industries in Britain, and the whole position was aggravated by a series of strikes, especially on the Tyne and Clyde rivers, caused by wage cuts in these undertakings. By September 4.6% of trade unionists were out of work. In the building trade the figure was 6.9% at the end of September, rising to 8.1% at the end of the following month.[1] Only the printing trades seemed immune from what a Board of Trade memorandum later called the "remarkable . . . collapse of practically all branches of trade and industry at the end of October after a period in most cases of considerable prosperity."[2] This was reflected in the renewed interest of trade unionists in unemployment which contrasted with their lack of concern at the beginning of the year. For the first time in some years the grouping committees at the annual T.U.C. conference included one to deal with resolutions on unemployment, and a resolution was passed calling on the government to implement an immediate programme of national works, and to lay the foundations for

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1 Table 1.

2 Board of Trade, The position of employment and trade at the beginning of 1908, January 1908, p 28.

the permanent re-organisation of industry on co-operative lines.[1] This was welcomed by the Social Democrats who saw in it some indication that at last trade unionists were waking up to the fact that the answer to unemployment did not lie in unionism itself.[2]

The collapse of the boom must have increased the worries of those Liberals who were concerned about the government's inaction, particularly when the Labour Party's autumn campaign got under way. By mid-September MacDonald had 45 speaking engagements arranged, Snowden 40, Parker 12, and Summerbell 8.[3] They were not all concerned with unemployment by any means, for the campaign's aims were diverse. Old age pensions figured quite prominently and a conference planned for the new year was to devote one day each to unemployment and pensions. The campaign had also been undertaken with a view to re-asserting the party's position in the public interest, Hardie telling Glasier some time during the summer that "somehow we don't seem to bulk so large as we did in the eye of the public."[4] It was also hoped to offset the rise of left wing and

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1907, pp 196-97.

2 Social Democrat, XI (October 1907), pp 580-81.

3 Labour Leader, 20 September, 1907.

4 Quoted in L.Thompson, Robert Blatchford (London, 1951), p 185.

activist criticism which had grown slowly through the year in response to the party's failure to achieve anything in parliament. Even Frank Smith, who was so close to many of the socialist M.P.'s in the Right to Work Council, had advocated as early as April that the Labour Party should go in to the parliamentary battle for the unemployed with "the fierce determination to allow no proceedure or miserable objections to stand in the way of justice."[1] But notwithstanding its varied motives, the campaign did stress unemployment and there was a militant tone in many of the labour speeches. Summerbell told his constituents that they would fight to the death for the unemployed in the coming session.[2] Three weeks later at Nelson, Snowden said that the Labour Party would create such a wave of public feeling that the government would be compelled to legislate.[3] He spoke again on unemployment at Maidstone and Chiswick in November, and at Rochdale in December. Others who devoted speeches to unemployment included MacDonald at Islington, Kettering and Derby; Parker at Briton Ferry and Barry; Barnes at Sunderland; and Pete Curran at Bradford.[4] At Newton, Seddon told his

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1 I.L.P., Annual Report, 1907, p 55.

2 Labour Leader, 11 October, 1907.

3 Ibid., 1 November, 1907.

4 See ibid., September-December 1907, passim.

audience that if there was no satisfaction from the government in the coming session then "wigs will be on the green at St Stephens . . . ."[1]

The vigour of the campaign caused much alarm to the other parties. At the beginning of October, for example, J.B.Walton wrote to the Prime Minister informing him that "2000 meetings are being held every week. Great quantities of socialist literature are being sold . . . 20 special organisers are at work . . . . I place these facts before you . . . so that matters are no longer allowed to drift and to land us in electoral disasters."[2] One Conservative told Balfour that the "Socialist and Labour Party are gaining thousands of adherents every week."[3] Even Austen Chamberlain told his leader that "Labour-Socialism is making enormous strides . . . ."[4] Some elements were so worried by all this activity that in October 200 delegates from various anti-socialist bodies met in London and decided to set up a central committee to co-ordinate the effort against socialism, a committee which eventually emerged as the Anti-Socialist Union in 1908.[5] By early December the I.L.P. had been

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1 Labour Leader, 13 December, 1907.

2 J.B.Walton to H.Campbell Bannerman, 9 October, 1907. Campbell Bannerman Papers. B.M.Add.MSS 41240, f 98.

3 A.E.Fellowes to A.J.Balfour, 24 October, 1907. Balfour Papers. B.M.Add MSS 49859, ff 183-84.

4 A.Chamberlain to A.J.Balfour, 24 October, 1907. Ibid., 49736, f 25.

5 The Times, 25 October, 1907.

forced to appeal for funds to carry out a campaign against the anti-socialists.[1]

It is impossible to measure the success of the Labour Party's winter campaign of 1907. It is true that party membership rose from 998,338 in 1906-07 to 1,072,413 at the end of 1907, and to 1,158,565 at the end of 1908.[2] It is worth noting too, that labour and socialist candidates won 27 seats in the municipal elections in November when the tide was flowing strongly in favour of the Conservatives, although it should be remembered, as The Times pointed out, that local elections were generally fought on local issues.[3] Perhaps the best testimony to the success of the campaign was the intense interest exhibited when the Right to Work Bill was eventually brought back in to parliament in 1908.

The S.D.F. had not been idle on the unemployment front either, but Williams was beginning to find the strain of three weekly meetings on Tower Hill too much for him, and he appealed for helpers. Financial difficulties were also hampering him. The federation-inspired C.W.C. had collapsed after its successes of 1905, due,

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1 See the letter of appeal in Southwark Branch I.L.P., Minutes, 3 December, 1907.

2 Figures cited in H.Pelling, Short history of the Labour Party (London: 2nd ed., 1965), p 134. The last two figures include the membership of the Women's Labour League.

3 The Times, 4 November, 1907.

according to a member of its committee, to lack of funds, and in December 1907, J.Morton wrote to suggest the formation of a new organisation on lines similar to those of the old C.W.C.[1] Although Williams had carried on with his meetings,by March he was working for nothing, as the S.D.F. executive could no longer afford to pay him. On 30 March he made a purely private appeal for funds but by the end of the following month this had only brought in £2-15-5.[2] Perhaps it was not only trade unionists who were uninterested in unemployment in times of prosperity, but it seems more likely that the poor response was in some way connected with the general financial malaise which seems to have affected the federation in the middle of 1907. In the summer, for example, the executive had to consider increasing members' subscriptions.[3] In June, Knee announced that the London Organisation Fund was "absolutely bankrupt."[4]

All this meant that the provincial branches were left very much to their own devices - as, indeed, were the London ones - in organising local agitations as unemployment increased. As usual, Hackney, Lewisham, Battersea, and Willesden were very active. Williams was

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1 For the collapse of the C.W.C. see Trades and Labour Gazette, February 1907, p 4. For Morton's letter see Justice, 7 December, 1907.

2 Justice, 27 April, 1907.

3 Ibid., 12 April, 1907.

4 Ibid., 15 June, 1907.

unable to organise any regular marches as he had done in previous years, and the only two he did manage were both of a rather special nature. One, on 13 November, was a protest against the lavish reception afforded to the Russian Czar in London while so many Englishmen were starving, although there were elements of political protest involved in this demonstration, for the Czar's autocratic domestic regime was universally unpopular with socialists. This march saw clashes with the police which fostered the hope in the hearts of some Social Democrats that "the unemployed will continue to make themselves increasingly felt as a menace to the existing order . . . ."[1] The second march, organised two days before Christmas, was a march of unemployed ex-servicemen designed to invite comparison with a banquet provided by the Daily Telegraph for survivors of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The weakness of the S.D.F. in the latter half of 1907 may explain why the executive wrote to the T.U.C. suggesting that a joint national unemployment conference be held. This suggestion was rejected by the parliamentary committee on the grounds that conferences had already been held, the matter fully discussed, and a bill introduced in parliament.[2] It might have been

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1 Justice, 16 November, 1907.

2 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 16 October, 1907.

added that the Labour Party was thinking of holding its own conference early in the new year - on unemployment and old age pensions.[1] The best that the federation could manage was press support for a "right to work" demonstration organised on 17 November by the L.T.C. It is perhaps indicative of the decline of S.D.F. power that of the fourteen-man committee charged with arranging this demonstration, only two were federation members, compared with the majority it had enjoyed on the old C.W.C.

Only two Labour M.P.'s supported this demonstration, Will Thorne and James O'Grady. This may have been because the rest had prior engagements, or because they were already engaged in the Labour Party's own campaign, which was much concerned with unemployment. More puzzling, however, is the silence of the Right to Work Council in this period. Some of the provincial branches were active, for example, Edinburgh, but Smith, apart from his outburst at the the I.L.P. conference in April, remained silent. Perhaps this very outburst provides the clue, for it was in favour of a militant parliamentary policy, and it may be that the Right to Work Council was pinning its hopes on the introduction of the party's Unemployed Bill in the approaching session.

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1 Infancy of the Labour Party, II, p 57. 8 November, 1907.

But it was not only the socialists who were vocal in the last months of 1907, for the tariff reform cry was heard once more. Its organisations had not been inactive since the general election, though they had experienced many difficulties.[1] By March 1907 James Reid, a member of the A.S.E. who had been appointed western district organiser of the T.U.T.R.A., could claim that since the election (in which he had been defeated Unionists candidate at Greenock) 3000 men had joined the Association, and that 60 new branches had been formed in the Bristol area alone.[2] The Scottish District Council had also appointed an organiser, William Queen, and a large increase in Scottish membership was reported in September.[3] In Yorkshire, Willie Dyson and J.T.Hargreaves performed a similar function, working continuously from August 1906 to October 1907.[4] With the increase in unemployment towards the end of the year the society's confidence rose and an application was made to the Labour Party for permission to send delegates to the forthcoming conference on unemployment. The request was rejected on the grounds that only societies eligible for

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1 See W.A.S.Hewins, Apologia of an imperialist (London: Two Vols., 1929), I, p 184.

2 Monthly Notes on Tariff Reform, May 1907, p 443.

3 The Times, 26 September, 1907.

4 Monthly Notes on Tariff Reform, October 1907, p 302.

membership of the Labour Party were being invited.[1] The Association was supported by the T.R.L., which at the end of the year produced a spate of pamphlets, all dealing with unemployment and containing such statements as "employers clamouring for skilled labour in Germany", and "if you want more work and wages vote for tariff reform".[2] At the end of December the N.U.C.A. put twenty horse drawn vans on the road to propagate tariff reform. They were liberally marked with posters claiming that "fiscal reform means work for all."[3] Several trade union reports commented on the re-emergence of the tariff panacea and this was welcomed by George Barnes, who urged the workers to ask themselves persistently just what the free trade alternative was.[4]

(iii)

It may have been the spread of tariff propaganda and the consequent references to the German economy which prompted the management committee of the G.F.T.U. to instruct its secretary to gather information on unemployment in other countries for a general discussion.[5] Alternatively, it may have been linked with the fact

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1 Infancy of the Labour Party, II, p 61. 18 December, 1907.

2 T.R.L. Leaflet No. 118 : ibid No. 126.

3 Labour Leader, 13 December, 1907.

4 A.S.E., Annual Report, 1907, p x.

5 G.F.T.U., M.C.Minutes, 20 December, 1907. G.F.T.U., Proceedings and Reports, 1906-1907.

that Beveridge was still wooing the labour leaders with his plan for employment exchanges, and that at the end of the year Henderson and Barnes went to Germany to investigate at first hand the German exchanges, "their effect and their methods of working, how they were regarded by the Trades Unionists, and generally speaking to obtain as much information as possible about them . . . ."[1] Beveridge, as shown in the previous chapter, had been at pains to win union support for the exchanges operated by the C.U.B., but by the end of 1906 it was clear that the unions distrusted them. In January 1907, the joint board, concluding that all 26 were working against the interests of the unions and without regard to their effect on union-run bureaux, resolved to seek an interview with the C.U.B.[2] The deputation demanded that the conditions for union support of the exchanges, as laid down at the last T.U.C. conference, should be met. It was agreed that no worker should be supplied by the exchanges in the case of a strike, and also that no preference should be given to non-union men. But the C.U.B. was reluctant to guarrantee that all jobs would be offered only at union rates and conditions, and the joint board report

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1 A.Henderson & G.Barnes, Unemployment in Germany (London, 1907), p 1.

2 T.U.C., P.C.Minutes, 9 January, 1907.

subsequently compiled by Gill, Curran, and Stephenson, stated that although the skilled workers could probably look after themselves, the question was whether unskilled men, particularly those in general labour unions, should be encouraged to register at exchanges which were refusing to recognise union conditions. The report also discussed the question of what action the unions should take if a boycott of the exchanges was suggested by those who were opposed to the use of rate money to maintain them. In conclusion the report said that "unless the conditions laid down by the Joint Board . . . (and) endorsed by the Liverpool Trades Union Congress, are agreed to, Labour Exchanges should be strenuously opposed."[1] At the end of May the joint board told the C.U.B. that, as labour was being supplied at below union rates, "we can take no other course than advise the workers of London to refrain from patronising or supporting your exchanges in any way whatever."[2] This letter had the desired effect, for the C.U.B., possibly under pressure from its labour members and perhaps from Beveridge himself, decided that it was not possible to take on the power of the London unions and the national labour movement, and it was unanimously decided that in the case of union

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1 G.F.T.U., 31st Quarterly Report, March 1907, pp 7-8.

2 The Times, 4 June, 1907.

men applying for work, jobs should only be supplied at union rates.[1] This ran into opposition from two quarters. The Local Government Board wrote to the clerk of the C.U.B. expressing strong disapproval, a letter which was forwarded to Beveridge.[2] From the other side came protest from the L.T.C., which in November condemned the policy of the Local Government Board in allowing the exchanges to operate without guarranteed union conditions as this would, it was claimed, act as an incentive to cheap labour, reduced wages, and the reduction of the standard of living.[3]

Beveridge meanwhile, was working hard with his plans for a national scheme of labour exchanges and in March he published an article in the Economic Journal which advocated such a system.[4] Soon Lord George Hamilton was writing to him, asking "what will Trades Unions say to Universal Labour Exchanges?"[5] In fact, as is already evident, they were cautious. Ramsay MacDonald appears to have liked the idea but was against the current mode of operation. When Beveridge sent him a memorandum on his plan he replied that "I have held very strongly for a long time that any attempted

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1 The Times, 10 June, 1907.

2 Local Government Board to Central Unemployed Body, 31 August, 1907. Unemployment Collection, ii.

3 Trades and Labour Gazette, December 1907, p 4.

4 See p 197.

5 Lord George Hamilton to W.H.Beveridge, 21 April, 1907. Beveridge Papers. L, III, 225.

settlement of the Unemployed Problem which was worth trying should be directed by this among other ideas, that unemployed labour should be made more fluid."[1] George Barnes told the poor law commissioners that he could see "no good likely to result from them", although his mind might have been changed by his visit to Germany.[2] John Ward, on the other hand, felt that they could be quite useful - if they were controlled by direct representatives of the workers.[3] T.Fox of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council said that they had had little trouble with the exchange operated by the Manchester Distress Committee, mainly because labour was well represented on the controlling committee.[4] W.J.Davis, however, was dubious of the possibilities of extending such a degree of control to a national level. It would be thought generous, he said, if the workers were given one place on the committees.[5] There was some demand from the floor at the T.U.C. conference in September to increase pressure on all the authorities responsible for labour bureaux to prevent them from supplying blacklegs in times of disputes. Cummings promised

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1 J.Ramsay MacDonald to W.H.Beveridge, 26 July, 1907. Beveridge Papers. L, III, 225.

2 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, Appendix VIII (Cd.5066). British Parliamentary Papers, 1910, XLVIII, p 247.

3 Ibid., p 276.

4 Ibid., p 299.

5 Ibid., p 352.

that they would keep any eye on this although he warned that it was unlikely that the parliamentary committee could achieve much more than it already had done, as not all the members of the controlling boards were trade unionists.[1]

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1 T.U.C., Annual Report, 1907, p 151.