

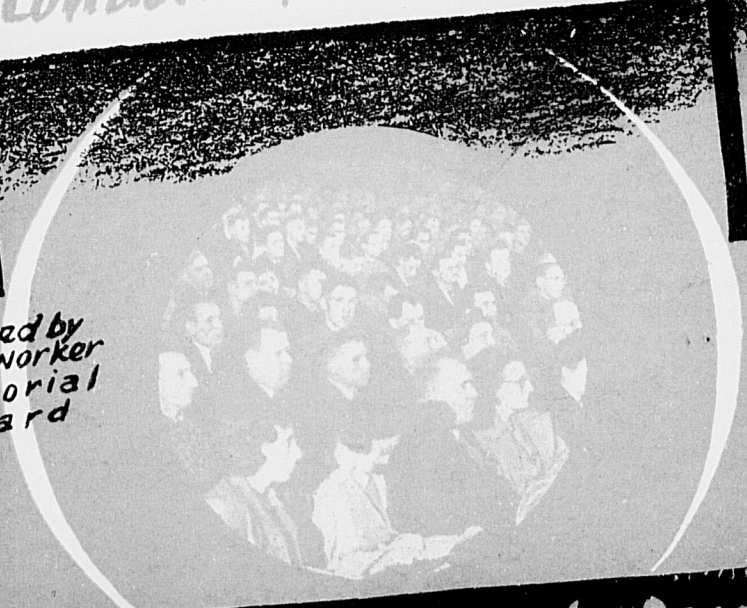
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Report of
UNITY
Conference

London April 2nd 1944

Convened by
Daily Worker
Editorial
Board



To Win the War & the Peace

Price One Penny

UNITY CONFERENCE REPORT

THIS is a report of the historic conference of Unity convened by the Editorial Board of the "Daily Worker," held at the Stoll Theatre on April 2, 1944.

At this conference 1,762 delegates from every type of industry and all trends of progressive thought faced the urgency of unity for victory in the war, for overcoming all obstacles to the mobilisation of resources and man-power in the war effort, and for laying the foundations for victory in the peace, too.

With deep enthusiasm and a full sense of what it can mean, the delegates passed this resolution:

"This Conference greets the decision of the Executive Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union calling on the Labour Party to convene a conference to formulate a common policy for the working-class movement in readiness for the next general election, and pledges itself to do all in its power in support."

This resolution was moved by Mr. James Tennyson, of the Scottish Mineworkers' Union, and seconded by Mr. H. Gunson, of the National Executive of the Shop Assistants' Union.

The decision of the Editorial Board of the "Daily Worker" to convene a Unity Conference was regarded by progressive opinion as a correct and useful one, said **Mr. Arthur Horner**, president of the South Wales Miners' Federation, in his opening remarks as chairman of the Conference.

Referring to the ban imposed by the National Council of Labour on the Conference, Mr. Horner read a letter sent to the editor of the "Daily Worker" from Mr. B. Gardner, general secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

The letter stated that the union was unable to be represented at the Conference owing to the National Council of Labour's ban, but had called on the Labour Party to convene a similar conference.

Mr. Horner then went on to outline the most urgent issues before the Conference, both in the morning session, devoted

to issues concerned with the fight to win the war, and the afternoon session on post-war problems.

Striking a note of warning, he spoke of the deep sense of frustration caused by Government policy, the lack of clarity regarding the perspectives of the war, and the fact that some people even think of the war as already won. One of the main jobs of the Conference was to make everyone deeply aware of the realities of the war, and of the dangers of turning away from the main issues.

These dangers were to be seen, Mr. Horner pointed out, in the way in which strikes are being provoked, the sparring for political positions, and the desire of some people to end the National Government.

"Let us not forget that Fascism is a cunning and powerful enemy," he continued. "We cannot look forward to the complete destruction of the Nazis until the great invading armies of the democratic Powers, moving forward from both West and East, meet in Berlin itself."

Mr. Horner then went on to speak of the problems of the post-war period. He spoke of the necessity of the mines being nationalised, the land, the steel industry and transport being brought under the control of the people.

"I would like to tell the Government," he said, "that equal pay for equal work is a just principle which ought to have been long ago established. Also the raising of soldiers' pay and allowances is long overdue."

He claimed priority of houses for returning soldiers and their families after the war; the raising of the school-leaving age to sixteen and the reform of the educational system; the necessity for a national health service and the introduction of a new workmen's compensation scheme.

"I know," he continued, "that the Young Tories have begun to promise us these things, but I do not think many of us here are taken in by the fair words of these 'reformed characters.'"

The people would only carry out the vast necessary social changes as a result of resolute organisation and struggle. Our strongest weapon is unity, the ending of divisions among ourselves, the ending of the bans which prevent common action.

"This Conference," he concluded, "will face these problems today and I believe that the outcome will be that we shall be better fitted to bring the war to an early conclusion and

better fitted to tackle and solve the problems of peace because we have gathered here today."

Mr. John Horner, first speaker at the morning session, was applauded when he said he was representing his union (the Fire Brigades Union) against the recommendations of the National Council of Labour.

Pointing to the paramount need for early unity in this country, Mr. Horner said the working-class movement was unprepared.

No one under 31 has yet cast a vote, yet millions of people have moved to the Left.

He called for a rallying of the progressive parties and individuals behind a policy that would clearly indicate how the war can be speedily brought to a successful conclusion. By associating with the Soviet Union, the peace could be won and monopoly capitalists routed. To achieve this, the National Government must be reconstituted.

Mr. Tom Wintringham, speaking for Common Wealth, gave a practical example of the unity which must be achieved. He said when he went to a recent by-election a Liberal agent handed him on to a Communist Party secretary to go to a meeting where there was a Common Wealth chairman.

"We stress the differences we have here," he said, "because we believe in a free and open and frank discussion! We can by that means get a real unity of aim."

He wanted the ending of the coalition in this country, and the resumption of full democratic politics.

Dealing with the argument that if the coalition were broken up this would strengthen certain capitalist elements endeavouring to come to an "accommodation" with Hitler, Mr. Wintringham said:

"A rat in the open is better than a rat in the larder. The people of this country are perfectly able to recognise a rat if pointed out to them."

Mrs. Corbett Ashby greatly regretted she could not be present as a Liberal Party delegate. Still, she did represent an enormous number of ordinary rank-and-file members of that party.

The time had come to fight the Conservative Party, which stood for all the privileges, misery, unemployment and ill-health. Progressives should come together, particularly on domestic issues, as they had done at Bury St. Edmunds.

To obtain unity of organisation it would be necessary to by-pass the headquarters of both the Labour and Liberal Parties.

Differences, she concluded, must be swept aside if we are to defeat Fascism.

Mr. William Gallacher, for the Communist Party, said he could not agree with the argument used by Tom Wintringham that it was desirable to stress the differences that existed. It was futile, too, to discuss getting national unity by breaking up the National Government. But the issue now was—all here in the Conference wanted unity.

But there was no possibility of unity in any real sense without the Labour Party and the great trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party.

Breaking up the National Government would, in fact, put the Labour Party and the trade unions outside the proposal of unity. He was in complete agreement, however, that the war could not be effectively conducted, nor peace properly won, by a Tory-dominated coalition.

There was loud applause when Mr. Gallacher contrasted the achievement of Marshals Zhokov and Koniev and the "miserable policy of Sir James Grigg in this country."

The Labour Party must be told they had now a great responsibility not only for winning the war, but over the whole future of the people of the country.

They must come out openly for unity, they must arouse the people. We should demand a completely reconstructed Government that would unite militarily and politically with the mighty Soviet Union and will carry through with the utmost vigour a policy that will win the war and secure the peace for all time for the masses of the people in this country and in Europe.

From Scotland, **Mr. James Stirling** (A.S.L.E.F., Glasgow)



W. Gallacher.

came to accuse the railway companies of "a spot of sabotage" in not making and maintaining efficient railway rolling stock, particularly engines.

A Yorkshire miner, **Mr. Harry Roberts** (Bullcroft branch, Yorkshire Miners' Association), spoke of the urgency of nationalisation of the mines, which 700,000 miners wanted.

Mr. Alan P. Good, of Common Wealth, said he was a managing director of a factory, and was aware of the feeling of frustration in some factories.

There were thousands of managers who felt as he did. We should not split up into units merely to decide how to get things done. We should stand as one body to get a progressive Government in power.

But organised Labour must lead, and, further, victory would not come by decisions reached a few weeks before a general election.

There was no need, he agreed, for a new party at all—once the Labour Party started to do their job of work.

One of the most stirring, challenging and loudly applauded speeches of the morning's session came from **Mrs. A. Rowe**, of Watford A.E.U.

She spoke of the wastage of enthusiasm of the workers in the factories. Time after time they were frustrated by the management.

In her factory they had had to fight for a joint production committee, and it was a common happening in other factories in the country.

Unity must start in the factories, at the bottom. "We have the power if only we can unite. After all, we are the workers!"

"The whole world depends on us: the war depends on us: life depends on us: realise your own importance! Go back and face managements to get the things done that you want!"

Summing up the morning's proceedings of the Conference, **Mr. D. N. Pritt, K.C., M.P.**, pointed to examples of real unity that had been achieved in Greece, France and Yugoslavia.

We would not get rid of Grigg, Lyttleton and the others if we did not unite the progressive forces and make the Government realise it must give way. We must also unite to see the Second Front was not opened too late.

Unity must be built from the bottom, and every progressive organisation must join in this fight.

This Conference must be the beginning of a great new stage in the campaign.

Sir Richard Acland, M.P. (Common Wealth), first speaker in the afternoon session, asked for a "terrific campaign" for the nationalisation of mines. There was really no solution for future reconstruction in this country except Socialism.

It was no use asking for trivial issues, a little better Beveridge or such-like.

The Socialist and democratic forces of the world are now stronger than monopoly capitalism and there should be no appeasement under any circumstances. The strength of the Left movement will carry us forward to victory in this war and the peace.

R. Palme Dutt said the Communist Party welcomed and supported the declarations made for the broadest democratic and progressive unity to carry forward the advance of the people for victory over Fascism. If we had had such unity in the days before the war, the war need never have taken place.

What there was in common was far more important than the differences between our various organisations, and we could settle our differences by democratic discussion.

The whole audience stood up and applauded for half a minute when the next speaker, **Mr. Krishna Menon**, spoke of the suicidal policy of the Government in India in maintaining the isolation of the people.

The Indian leaders must be released, Mr. Amery must be sacked, and it must be stated clearly that the principles of the Atlantic Charter, Cairo and Teheran applied to India.

Mr. P. Belcher, of the Tobacco Workers' Union, said next year's T.U.C. General Council must discuss fully the whole question of unity.

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Sir R. Acland.

Mr. W. J. Ellerby, assistant secretary, Civil Servants Clerical Association, asked for a more evolutionary conception of trade unionism. Not only should trade unions be concerned with mere bread and butter questions, but we were entering a new stage of society, and the trade unions must play an increasing part in this new development.

The rank and file have a right to participate in management. In the Civil Service it is frowned on as "interference with the administrative prerogative," but the value of production and factory committees has been proved abundantly in this war.

Mr. H. V. Manley, of Oxford, said he and other bricklayers wanted to build houses for the people after the war, and all they wanted was legislation to carry it out.

Gordon Clothier, Gillingham Co-op., spoke of the need to put in some hard spade work in raising the standard and conditions of living and education in the villages.

Joe Scott, speaking not as an official of the A.E.U., but as a member of the Editorial Board of the "Daily Worker," spoke of particular problems that will face the youth of this country entering industry after the war.

There were thousands of lads in the Forces who had been away from industry for some four and a half years. They knew what had happened during the war when workers organised their own factories.

There must be a new type of education for the young people. Young lads must not be apprenticed to an employer but to an industry as such, and all the work and meaning of that industry must be shown to them.

If that did not happen, education might continue to be merely academic.

Mr. W. S. Benjamin, of the Socialist Medical Association,



W. J. Ellerby.

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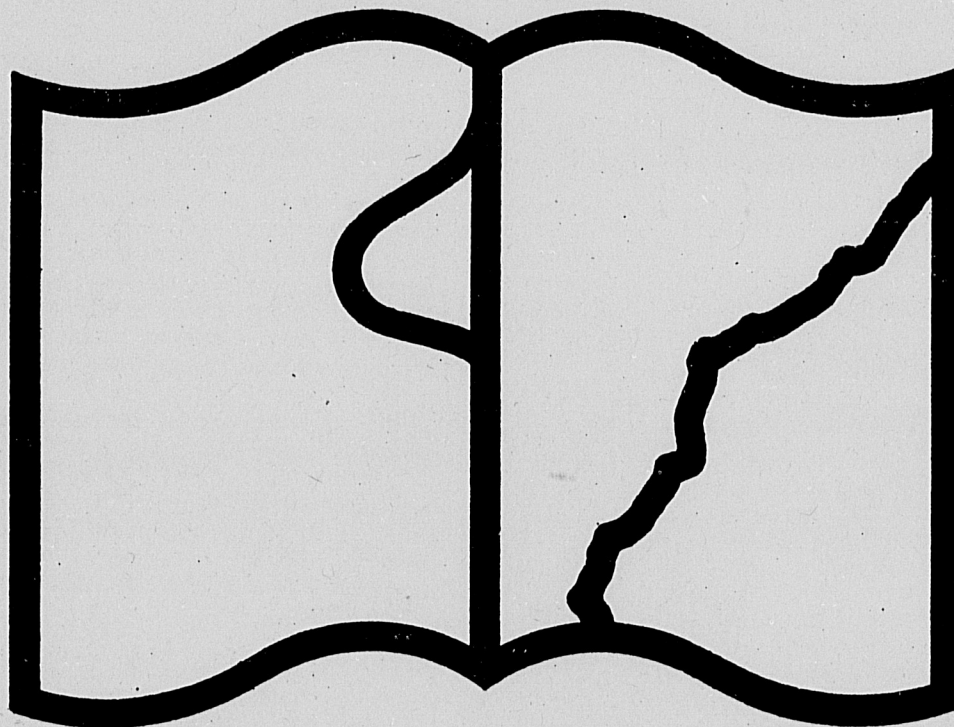
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spoke of a National Health Service, suggesting the setting up of a Joint Efficiency Committee in hospitals.

The Chairman of Common Wealth, **Mr. R. G. McKay**, said constituency organisations must be built up now by all parties of the Left. Transport House must be side-stepped: Common Wealth would back any Labour Member of Parliament, but they would certainly not let by-elections go by default. It would not worry him which progressive M.P.s got in—so long as we got a Socialist majority in the House of Commons.

The alternative vote and Proportional Representation would give the progressive parties a better opportunity—indeed, if by that means 85 per cent. to 90 per cent. of voters could be made to vote, he was sure the progressive parties could get in.

"Show the people of Europe that we are coming to their aid not only with the Second Front but with a Socialist House of Commons as well," he concluded.

The work that must be done to improve the working and living conditions of agricultural labourers and to bring prosperity to British farming was outlined by **Mr. George Mathews**, of the National Farmers' Union (though not representing them officially).

Reactionaries had always tried to drive a wedge between the town and country workers, he said, and it was the job of progressives of all parties to help bridge that gap.

Workers in the country were feeling more uncertain about their future than they had done for some time. This arose from the betrayal of agriculture after the last war; and from their living conditions, including the disgraceful scandal of the housing programme.

After the war there must be no going back to a diet of bread and marg. There must be a better standard of living and nutrition.

"The Conference has been unique; it has been representative, vigorous and expressive of the sincerity and earnestness of the people of this country."

With these words, **William Rust**, editor of the "Daily Worker," closed the Conference.

The Conference would leave a lasting impress on the Labour, Trade Union, and Co-operative movement of the country, which must now go into action and take the

or turned to side issues and left the winning of the war to the Red Army."

To those Tories who restricted the war effort, **Mr. Rust** said, amid great applause: "The day will come when all the accounts will be settled, when those who have been responsible for clogging our war effort and bringing suffering and misery to millions of people by the prolongation of the war will have to pay the price."

CREDENTIAL REPORT

THE report of the Credential Committee showed that over 2,000,000 people were represented by 1,762 delegates.

The following 12 trade union executives sent delegates:—
Constructional Engineers' Union; National Union of Scottish Mineworkers; Civil Service Clerical Association (observer); Association of Scientific Workers; Tobacco Workers' Union; Association of Cine Technicians; National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association; National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks; Hospital and Welfare Service Union; Ordnance Survey Technical Officers' Association; Scottish Brass Turners, Fitters and Finishers, and Fire Brigades' Union.

In addition to this national representation, 45 trade union district committees sent 83 delegates, and 833 trade union branches 1,164 delegates. Fifty Trades and Labour Councils sent 67 delegates, and local and divisional Labour Parties 17 delegates. The Communist Party sent 73 delegates, and Common Wealth 32 delegates.

Shop stewards' committees, totalling 204, were represented by 288 delegates.

The Co-operative movement was represented by seven Societies (ten delegates), 32 Guilds (46 delegates), seven Co-operative Party local councils (ten delegates).

Other organisations included the University Labour Federation, Socialist Medical Association, and the Committee for Cyprus Affairs.

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initiative in spreading the ideas which would lead the movement forward, united in war and united for peace.

"I was very glad to hear Sir Richard Acland emphasise the importance of bringing the Labour and trade union movements into action.

"Our main concern after this Conference must be to see that we stir up the millions of people in this country and create that new understanding that can be translated in a practical way into unity in organisation and action," said Mr. Rust.

He was very proud of the job done by the "Daily Worker" in the organising of the Conference. The Editorial Board of this working-class paper, that was owned by the people themselves, had always cherished the idea that the paper should be a medium for furthering the unity of the people of this country.

There had been no representatives of the Armed Forces present that day, but there was an obvious reason for that. If anyone wanted to know the reason—they should ask Sir James Grigg for it!

But the fact that they were not there explained a weak side of the Conference—that, in fact, insufficient regard was paid to the problems of the fight to win the war.

If these soldiers, sailors and airmen had been present, there would certainly have been a stern note of reality from them of what is required from the civilian public.

We must unite our forces for the greatest effort we had ever made so that the forces of Fascism were finally destroyed, said Mr. Rust. In that light it could be seen that the main question was not to break the coalition, but to generate policies which would stir up our people and bring about changes in the Government.

"Never let it be said that we shirked our responsibilities



W. Rust.