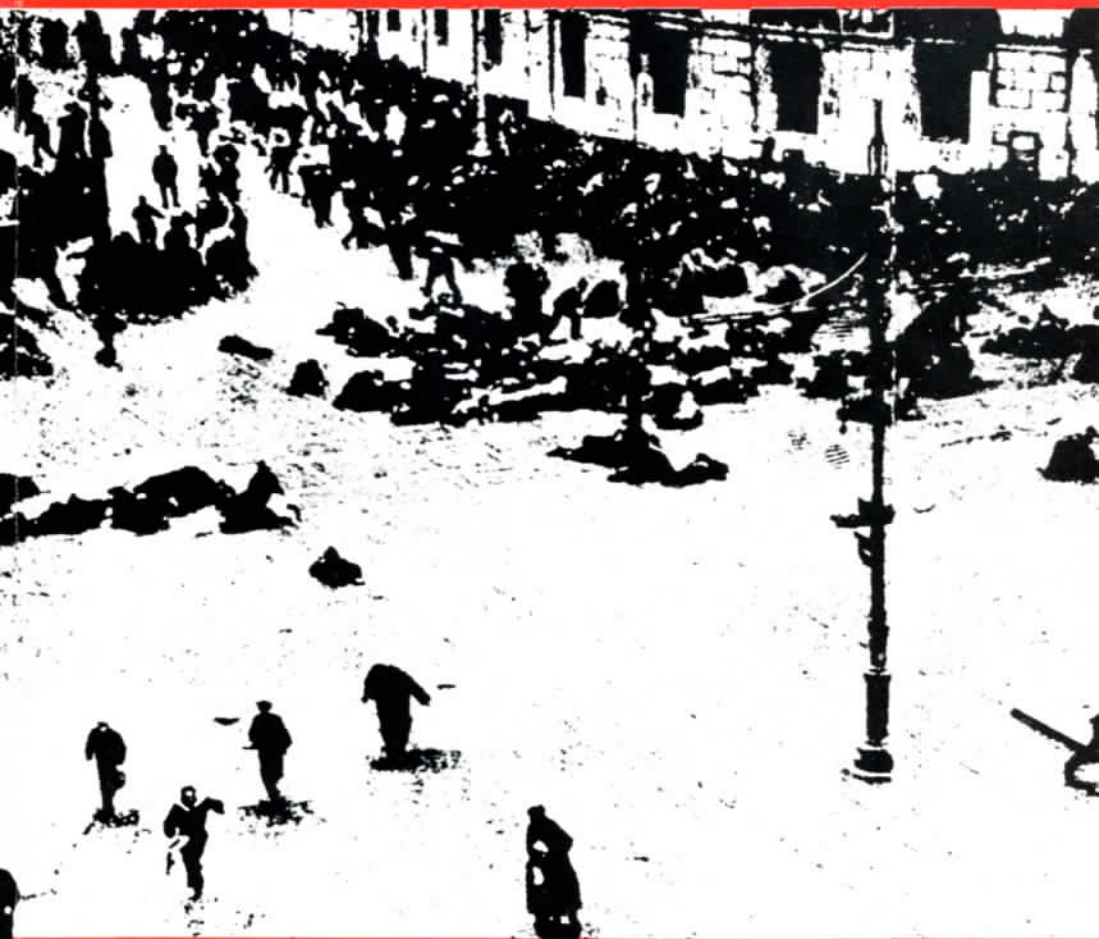


# *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*

The Leeds Convention:  
a report from the  
Daily Herald  
with an Introduction  
by Ken Coates



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*Robert Smillie, Chairman of the Leeds Convention*

# Introduction

by Ken Coates

The Leeds Convention of June 1917 has been described by Ralph Miliband as "perhaps the most remarkable gathering of the period."<sup>1</sup> The description seems to be a fair one.

To bring together 1,150 delegates, and to accommodate on one platform such assorted characters as Ramsay Macdonald, Philip Snowden, W.C. Anderson, Tom Mann, Bob Smillie, Ben Tillett, Robert Williams and Bertrand Russell was no small feat of organisation for the fragmented British left. Of course, the United Socialist Council, which convened the meeting, was reacting to the altogether unprecedented stimulus of the Russian Revolution.

The United Socialist Council had been formed in July 1913, when the Socialist International Bureau convened a meeting of British socialist organisations to discuss the possibilities of unity. Vandervelde and Huysmans had attended for the Bureau, and delegates had been assembled from the Independent Labour Party, the Fabians, and the British Socialist Party.



J. Ramsey MacDonald:  
*"kept telling long Scotch stories"*



**Dora Montefiore:**

*"one of the greatest tragedies of the war is to see the idealist laying down his life for a peace that is to be arranged by the materialist"*

The spokesmen of the International had recommended a dual solution to British disunity: the I.L.P. and the B.S.P. should fuse, and the B.S.P. should affiliate to the Labour Party, following which, pending further developments towards unity, a United Socialist Council was to be set up comprising all three bodies, under the chairmanship of Beatrice Webb.<sup>2</sup> At a subsequent conference attended by many international delegates, the B.S.P. put forward four conditions for unity with the I.L.P. Keir Hardie agreed to three of these: that the party should be free to proclaim its socialist goal, that it should recognise the existence of the class war, and that it should be free to carry on extra-Parliamentary activity including intervention in trade union struggles. The fourth, that B.S.P. parliamentary candidates should stand on an explicitly socialist ticket, was met by Hardie with a compromise proposal that the United Socialist Council should ask its members to request the Labour Party to amend its constitution to permit candidates to describe themselves as "Labour and Socialist".

The next year, 1914, the B.S.P. held a referendum which revealed agreement on affiliation.<sup>3</sup> Application was made, and accepted unanimously at the 1916 Labour Party Conference. Meantime, the war had sharpened the divergences between the revolutionary policies of the B.S.P. and the pacifist outlook of the majority of the I.L.P., to say nothing of the Fabian view, so that the United Socialist Council was shelved by the last two bodies. It took the Russian Revolution of March 1917 to bring revolutionaries and reformists close enough together to permit the B.S.P. and the I.L.P. to re-



vive the United Socialist Council, and convene the Leeds Convention.

Years later, Aneurin Bevan was to speak, at the Labour Party Conference, immediately after his resignation from the Attlee cabinet, of the impact of the Russian Revolution on the British workers.

"I am now 53 years of age. I was coming to adult life at the end of the 1914-18 war. I remember so well what happened when the Russian revolution occurred. I remember the miners, when they heard that the Tsarist tyranny had been overthrown, rushing to meet each other in the streets with tears streaming down their cheeks, shaking hands and saying; 'At last it has happened.' Let us remember in 1951 that the revolution of 1917 came to the working class of Great Britain, not as a social disaster, but as one of the most emancipating events in the history of mankind. Let us also remember that the Soviet revolution would not have been so distorted, would not have ended in tyranny, would not have resulted in dictatorship, would not now be threatening the peace of mankind, had it not been for the behaviour of Churchill, and the Tories at that time. Do not forget that in the early days when that great mass of backward people were trying to find their way to the light, were trying to lift themselves from age-long penury and oppression, they were diverted from their objectives and thrown back into the darkness, not by the malignancy of Stalin at first, but by the action and malignancy of Churchill, the City of London, New York and all the rest of the capitalist world.



**Ernest Bevin:**

*"The Platform says: 'the tide is on the rise for us.' For Whom? The professional politicians of the Labour Party"*

The reasons for fear in the world at the moment have never come from the poor people, whenever they are trying to improve their lot. They have always come from those who are trying to hold them down. That is why I am frightened at the prospect of what may happen in this election. I am really frightened. We have been for this period of 30 years reaping the bitter fruits of the failure of the British working class to put Bob Smillie, Lansbury, and men like that, in power in 1918 and 1919. The responsibility lies on us. We failed. Because we failed, as a result of our political insecurity, we find that great parts of the world that ought to be contributing to the prosperity of mankind are sources of fear of war."<sup>4</sup>

Bevan's emotion, created in the turmoil of his own bitter struggle of 1951, provoked him into a stark recapitulation of the hopes and disappointments of *his* lifetime. That lifetime was a part of the hard life experience of the British working class, which knows many years of disappointment and yet can remember a few brilliant flashes of hope. No flash was ever brighter than this, the dawn of the Revolution in Russia: and the Leeds Convention shows in the sharpest relief how British socialists saw it.

There can be no doubt that the Convention excited those who participated in it. John Paton, later to become an organiser of the I.L.P., wrote in his memoirs that the delegates "spent a deliriously happy weekend in bold talk of what they hoped to do. There had even been mention of the new Russian device of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils."<sup>5</sup>

Mrs. Dora Montefiore, the women's suffrage leader who helped to found the British Communist Party, unwittingly captured the great aspirations of the Convention in her description of the organisational difficulties it encountered and overcame: "This Leeds demonstration was so boycotted by the possessing class that we delegates on arrival at Leeds station found that all hotels had refused to receive us. In consequence our own Leeds comrades had rapidly organised a reception committee who were on the platform of the station, and directed us to the houses of the various comrades who were offering hospitality. This appeared to me to be an example of rapid and efficient organised Labour, the possibilities of which might, in the future, have far-reaching results."<sup>6</sup> The fiery content of the speeches might properly be judged in this context.

But not all the delegates suffered quite so drastic a boycott. Lady Constance Malleon, who was at the time very closely involved with Bertrand Russell in his pacifist campaigns, has recorded her own memories:

"We went from Cambridge to Leeds — where a conference was being held with the idea of establishing Workers' and Soldiers' Councils after the pattern of those in Russia. We joined a crowded train at Peterborough and we travelled up to Leeds in a third class carriage with about ten others: Ramsay MacDonald, Gerald Gould and Edgar Lansbury (a most delightful pair), B.R., etc. It was very hot — and Ramsay

MacDonald kept telling long Scotch stories. On our arrival at Leeds, the hotels did their best to refuse us accommodation . . . The waiters slapped our food in front of us anyhow. The crowd hissed as we went through the streets to the conference. Some of the children threw stones. There were a lot of police about. I had a seat at the very back of the gallery, right at the top. Russell got up to speak. I couldn't see him, but I knew it could be no one else — because he always got a bigger reception than anyone. There weren't many men over military age who thought it worthwhile to come out hot and strong against the war. B.R. spoke of Allen (whom we had just seen sentenced at Newhaven to a further term of imprisonment) and at Allen's name there was a burst of applause that must have lasted fully a minute. It was rather fine."<sup>7</sup>

Russell was somewhat unkind to MacDonald's jokes: he characterised them as "so dull that it was almost impossible to know when the point had been reached."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, MacDonald's oratory was not inhibited by the glum reception his anecdotes had received on the voyage up to Leeds. Leonard Woolf, another participant, reported it ironically, but not without sympathy:

"MacDonald, who exactly 20 years later was to end his political career widely discredited as the rather pitiful prisoner of his aristocratic and Tory allies, moved the first resolution: 'Hail! The Russian Revolution.' At one time I knew Ramsay fairly well and later on shall have more to say about him; here it is sufficient to say that he was in his element in 1917, a period of his career in which he was a rebel and pacifist in the political wilderness, addressing this immense sympathetic audience in Leeds. For he was a fine figure of a man, with a handsome face to satisfy a maiden's or a hairdresser's dream, with a golden bell-like bull-like voice which said nothing at such inordinate length and so persuasively that he could always get a Labour audience shouting with enthusiasm — at least until August 23, 1931, when most Labour people thought he had deserted them for the Londonderrys and the Tories."<sup>9</sup>

To hear MacDonald inveighing against "all forms of political, economic and imperialist oppression and exploitation", was not a new experience in 1917. What was new, was to hear him call "Let us lay down our own terms, make our own proclamations, establish our own diplomacy, see to it that we have our own international meetings."<sup>10</sup> Leonard Woolf also recollected, rather vividly, two other resolutions which were approved during the sessions:

"The second resolution, proposed by Snowden, pledged 'ourselves to work for . . . a peace without annexations or indemnities and based on the rights of nations to decide their own affairs'. The third resolution was on Civil Liberty, proposed by Ammon, a trade unionist Labour M.P., and Mrs. Despard. Mrs. Despard was a well known suffragette. A very frail elderly lady, she had, I think, only recently come out of gaol;



**Tom Mann:**

*"Let us urge France to do the same thing, but before we cry out to France, let us do it ourselves"*

she was given a tremendous reception by the meeting. Clio, the cynical Muse of History, who presumably knows both the future and the past, if she listened to our resolution, must have smiled grimly at the irony of facts. For this is what we voted unanimously:

This Conference calls upon the Government of Great Britain to place itself in accord with the democracy of Russia by proclaiming its adherence to and determination to carry into immediate effect a charter of liberties establishing complete political rights for all men and women, unrestricted freedom of the press, freedom of speech, a general amnesty for all political and religious prisoners, full rights of industrial and political association, and the release of labour from all forms of compulsion and restraint.

Another frail figure received an enthusiastic welcome when he supported the resolution in the precise, clipped, aristocratic voice which, I always think, Bertie Russell must have inherited from his 18th-century Whig ancestors. I wonder how many of us who cheered Bertie and the resolution remember what we had voted for when the democracy of Russia was embodied in first Lenin, Trotsky, and Dzerzhinsky, and later Stalin"<sup>11</sup>

More unusual still, as Ralph Miliband stresses, was the fourth resolution of the Convention, moved by W.C. Anderson and Robert Williams. Williams, in seconding, speaks out for the dictatorship of the proletariat. "We are competent to speak in the name of our own class, and damn the Constitution . . . If you are really sincere in sending greetings to Russia, I say to you: 'Go thou

and do likewise'." Even Anderson, in this ferment, burst out: "if revolution be that we are not going to put up in the future with what we have put up with in the past, then the sooner we have revolution in this country the better."

As Miliband rightly observes, "The Leeds Convention had fortuitously brought together the revolutionaries and the constitutionalists. But the gulf between them remained as profound as it ever had been and the instauration of the Bolshevik regime in November 1917 only served to widen that gulf."<sup>12</sup> This would have been clear to many of the Leeds delegates, as they cheered Williams' rousing speech. The parliamentarians were caught off-balance, but their position was still plain to those who read the newspapers.

For instance, barely one month before the Convention, the mover of the fourth resolution, the same W.C. Anderson, MP, had addressed the House of Commons. Here is what he said, and very revealing it is:

"The trouble is there. You have got to get through the trouble. You will either have to get through with wise guidance on the part of the local trade union leaders, or if they have nothing to do with it and wash their hands of it, then it will undoubtedly get into the hands of people in whose hands settlement will be much more difficult, if not altogether impossible. If there are some extremists in the trade union movement, as I have no doubt there are, I do say this that the best friends that the extremists have got . . . are the Government. The Government is creating



Mrs. Despard:

*"We did not have much liberty before the war, but now . . . we are allowing all our liberties to be taken away."*



**Bertrand Russell**

*"it is possible for the individual  
to stand . . . against the whole  
might of the organised state."*

extremists all the time. The extremists would have no power but for the grievances the Government are creating, they are giving the extremists their opportunity. Therefore the best way if you wish to deal with extremists is to remove discontent and try to get a better relationship established between the Government and organized labour throughout the country. I ask the Hon. Member whether he has yet reached any proposals with regard to the matter. Does he propose to close the door, or is he going to try to meet the views of the men? The men say that they wish you to honour what they regard as two undertakings on the part of the Government. Did you give those undertakings? And if you give those undertakings, do you mean to honour them? Those are quite clear, straight definite issues. Let me say in conclusion that I have been very much astonished indeed, in visiting various places recently at seeing a feeling springing up in this country which I did not believe possible, that is a deeper revolutionary feeling springing up among many of the workmen of this country. The old policy on the part of rulers there used to be that when grievances reached a certain point concessions were made, and very largely the steam taken out of the movement, so far as the extreme elements were concerned. What you are now doing by coercive laws, by repressive laws, by the penal side of the Munitions Act, and so on, is to try to dam up all the current of discontent, but that current will not be dammed up. I do assure you you will be astonished, and unless you are very careful you will bring the country to the very verge of revolution. Only a week ago, I saw 70,000 people: the estimate was made not by any labour people, but by one of the

local newspapers — march through the streets of Glasgow with bands and banners, every one of the members of that procession wearing the revolutionary colours. That is an amazing thing to happen in a city like Glasgow. I say that to a very large extent it is the policy of the Government that is responsible for that. Now you have to choose whether you are going to apply increasing repressions to these men, or whether you are going to try to establish confidence and a sense of freedom. That is really the issue. I hope that in what I have said this afternoon I have avoided anything that would increase passion, anything likely to make matters worse. I do hope the reply we may receive from the Government Front Bench will be an answer that will help to tone down or to remove that unrest that undoubtedly now exists."<sup>13</sup>

If this sums up precisely the true attitude of the reformist leaders of the movement, Anderson's subsequent speech at Leeds also reveals the extent to which they felt they were losing their grip.

Their audience at Leeds, from Trades Councils, shop stewards' organisations, and other grass-roots organs of Labour opinion and activity, was gathering an increasingly explicit experience against which to evaluate Russian events.

The drive to find cannon-fodder from the factories, coupled with the intensification of dilution, was producing a veritable explosion of feeling among the skilled trade unionists. Highly trained men, tied to their jobs, found themselves working for wages considerably lower than the earnings



**William Gallacher:**

*"This conference seems to be agreed that the Russian Revolution is definitely settled, but is it?"*

of semi-skilled and unskilled dilutees, who were able to benefit from piece-work rates designed to stimulate maximum war-time productivity. These skilled men provided the impetus to form a nation-wide Shop Stewards' Movement, which was already producing a heated agitation when the March Revolution erupted in Russia. After March strikes flared out all over Britain, culminating in a widespread movement of stoppages triggered off by a dispute at Rochdale on the issues of the extension of dilution from war work to commercial work, and the exemption of skilled men from conscription. Manchester, Sheffield, Coventry, Birmingham, London, Woolwich, Leicester, Rugby, Derby, Liverpool, Birkenhead, Leeds and Newcastle all joined in, so that at the height of the dispute a quarter of a million engineers were involved, all over England. (Significantly, the Clyde was not concerned: the repressions there had taken effect.) The "May Strikes" gave a big fillip to the drive for an explicit organisation of shop stewards and workers' committees, and on May 15th a national delegate conference of strike committees was held in London. Its proclamations were suppressed by the censor, and three days later its leaders were arrested. At this point the stewards sought aid from the national leaderships of their unions, who provided a formula for the release of the arrested men, which was based on a return to work. The Government thus regained control, and the strike was defeated although in some areas it continued for a week or two. But the shop stewards learned the obvious lesson: that without co-ordination they were powerless. Soon after the Leeds Convention, the first fully representative national conference of shop stewards was convened in Manchester, on August 18th and 19th. This was obviously profoundly influenced by the deliberations of the Leeds meeting.<sup>14</sup> Not only were leaders like Arthur McManus, Willie Gallacher and J.T. Murphy involved in both gatherings, but the content of the fourth resolution of the Convention was more and more appealing to the militants who were gathering around the shop stewards' banners.

It was this which worried authority. Graubard<sup>15</sup> quotes a fascinating interview between Will Thorne and King George V:

"The King seemed greatly disturbed about the famous Leeds Conference, and asked me if I knew anything about it. I said, 'Yes, I knew all about it. I've read all the proceedings.' I also told him about the telegram that had been sent from the Conference that made the Russians think we were spies, and he was amused at my story of the incidents that had happened over the message. 'Do you think that any ill will come from this Conference at Leeds and the decisions that were made there?' the King asked me, 'No,' I said, 'I've seen these things happen before many times in days gone by, and in my humble judgement there will never be a physical violent revolution in this country. But there will have to be many political and industrial chases within the course of the next few years.' This seemed to relieve his mind, and



he spoke to me in a most homely and pleasant way. I was very pleased."<sup>16</sup>

The historians have tended to accept, with relief, Thorne's view of the Convention. Alan Bullock, in his life of Bevin, speaks of it as "a preview of the British Left between the wars, anarchical, Utopian, already fascinated by and profoundly ignorant of the Russian experience."<sup>17</sup>

Middlemass, in his study of the I.L.P., writes of Bevin's tactless and uncouth intervention as an "attempt to restore sanity", and adds that "the enthusiasm of Snowden and MacDonald . . . left the Marxist delegates Gallacher and MacManus with nothing to add."<sup>18</sup> This was certainly not Gallacher's view. In the first volume of his autobiography he scornfully condemns the interventions of MacDonald and Snowden as a "regular orgy of generalities on the beauty and holiness of bourgeois democracy."<sup>19</sup> Gallacher, incidentally, denies that the record of the Convention contains any accurate report of his speech. Far from having "added nothing" he claims to have advanced a programme of revolutionary activities for the new National Committee which the Convention was to establish. He chides the *Daily Herald* for giving "column after column to MacDonald, Snowden and company", while he was accorded only one inch of space. (Gallacher, incidentally, wrongly states that George Lansbury was present at the Convention. Although the *Herald* actively promoted it, and Lansbury was most keen that it should succeed, he was too ill to attend, as the record makes plain.) Since the report of the Convention which we are producing is reprinted from the *Herald's* account, Gallacher's complaint is worthy of notice by those who have relied upon its evidence.

The fate of the Convention, its lapse from the status of central importance, accorded to it by so many socialists in the years after 1917, to a mere episode among the footnotes of Labour history, is part of the history of a whole succession of defeats which the Labour Movement encountered from 1920 onwards. But the episode occurred, and it is instructive to remember it.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Ralph Miliband — *Parliamentary Socialism*, p. 55.
2. Who was very flattered to be chosen, according to Margaret Cole — cf. *The Story of Fabian Socialism*, p. 170.
3. For an account of this episode, see Lee and Archbold — *Social Democracy in Britain*, pp. 210-17.  
See also Morton and Tate — *British Labour Movement*, pp. 244-5.
4. Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1951, p. 194.
5. John Paton, *Proletarian Pilgrimage*, p. 299.
6. Dora Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a Modern*, p. 194.
7. Constance Malleon, *After Ten Years*, London, Cape, 1931, pp. 113-4.
8. Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography* Volume 2, Allen & Unwin, p. 31.
9. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, Hogarth Press, 1964, p. 212.

10. See MacDonald's speech, below.
11. *Ibid*, pp. 212-3.
12. Miliband, *op. cit.*, p. 56-7.
13. Hansard, 14th May, 1917. This most revealing quotation was brought to my attention by Anthony Topham, who also provided the text of the pamphlet which is reproduced here, below.
14. For a detailed account of the disputes in engineering, see J.T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power*, pp. 135-60.
15. Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, p. 41.
16. Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, p. 195.
17. Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, Volume One, p. 75.
18. Middlemass, *The Clydesiders* - a left wing struggle for Parliamentary Power, p. 75.
19. Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, p. 149.



REPORT PUBLISHED BY THE COUNCIL OF  
WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS' DELEGATES

WHAT  
HAPPENED AT  
LEEDS

1917  
LONDON  
4 DUKE STREET  
ADELPHI  
W.C

**T**HE Leeds Convention of June 3rd was attended by 1,150 delegates from democratic bodies. The representation was made up as follows:—

Trades Councils and local Labour Parties	209 delegates
Trade Union Organisations	371 „
Independent Labour Party	294 „
British Socialist Party	88 „
Other Socialist Societies	16 „
Women's Organisations (including Women's Labour League, Women's International League, and Women's Co-operative Guild)	54 „
Other Organisations (including Adult Schools, Co-operative Societies, Union of Democratic Control, National Council for Civil Liberties, Peace Societies, and May-Day Committees)	118 „

By its fourth resolution the Conference set up a Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates, and appointed as members of the Central Committee the thirteen conveners of the Conference: H. Alexander, Charles G. Ammon, W. C. Anderson, M.P., C. Despard, E. C. Fairchild, J. Fineberg, F. W. Jowett, M.P., George Lansbury, J. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P., Tom Quelch, Robert Smillie, Philip Snowden, M.P., and Robert Williams. Thirteen members will be added to this number by the votes of district conferences, which will cover the whole country. These district conferences will take place in July.

Joint Secretaries of the Convention: A. Inkpin (B.S.P.), Francis Johnson (I.L.P.)



## MESSAGES AND LETTERS

### From the RUSSIAN SOLDIERS' AND WORKERS' DEPUTIES

**T**HE friendly Executive of the Soldiers' and Workmen's Deputies sends salutations and fraternal greetings to the Conference of Socialist and Workmen's Organisations at Leeds, and hopes to meet the representatives of the Leeds Conference between July 15 and 30. (*Cheers.*)

The Executive Committee finds Stockholm the most convenient place for the Conference. The agenda has not yet been definitely settled, but will be telegraphed to you later.

#### From GEORGE LANSBURY

It is a great disappointment to me not to be with you, but here I am on my back—a crock. I send you this message to congratulate you on coming together. You are taking part in a world-wide movement—a movement which may be hindered but can never be stopped. The Russian Revolutionists have not just an academic belief in their principles. They are determined to put them into action—they are putting them into action. It is the uprising of the proletariat. How shall we answer? We, too, must prove that when we talk of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, we mean exactly what we say. Not liberty for just a few; not equality in this or that section; not fraternity only in some nations or races; but Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity the world over. Let us show our Government—our Provisional Government—(*cheers*)—that we have learned one of the lessons they have been trying to teach Russia—the lesson of what the military call “The Unity of the Fronts.” Our front also is one—one with our brothers of the proletariat in Russia, in France, in Germany—(*cheers*)—in Austria, in Italy, in the United States—one with all the world's workers, who have been deluded, coerced, exploited by their Governments in this war. (*Cheers.*) Comrades, be strong in the work which you have set yourselves. Remember who you are, representatives of the great mass of the people in this country. I hope the Conference will send Robert Smillie and Robert Williams to Stockholm—(*cheers*)—and let us all send out one unanimous shout for International Solidarity—Solidarity—Solidarity. It is the slogan which will take us forward to a triumphant issue. When they condemn you for wanting peace, when they charge you with treason for being determined to end the war, tell them that it is treason against God, treason against humanity, not to end it—and at once. (*Cheers.*)

#### From a R.A.M.C. UNIT

We were very glad to see in this morning's *Manchester Guardian* a notice of a Conference to be held at Leeds shortly. We feel it our duty to write to you on the subject, as we think that the holding of such a Conference is a step in the right direction—(“Hear, hear”)—as the restatement of British war aims, and more especially the opening of negotiations between the belligerents are abso-

lutely necessary. We should very much like to see the establishment of a society on lines similar to those of the Council of Soldiers' and Workmen's in Russia, for we are quite convinced that the great majority of men in the Army are in sympathy with the Russian aims. (*Cheers.*) The difficulty is that the views of the Army and the workers in this country have no medium of expression. This would be remedied by the formation of a body representing the soldiers and workmen. Meantime we assure you of our cordial support, such as it is, and our gratitude for the taking of such steps, which can be the only basis for a lasting and democratic peace. I would place on record the fact that we are all soldiers of two years' service or more, and also late members of the B.E.F.

### From CLIFFORD ALLEN

Dear Mr. Smillie,—Three hours ago I received my third sentence of hard labour here—this time for two years. ("Shame.") I go back to prison to-morrow. Before I go may I be allowed to send you a personal message of goodwill, with profound gratitude for the heroic struggle you are making outside, and probably you may convey to the Leeds Convention the greetings of 1,000 Conscientious Objectors at present serving their second, third, or fourth sentences. I thrilled with delight when within the prison it was whispered that the Russian Democracy had at last triumphed, and my hopes became brighter when, upon my return to the military cells, I saw that the Russian Revolution meant international re-birth. I am wearing the khaki in this cell, so that I may consider myself part of the soldier section of your Convention, and perhaps after two sentences of hard labour I am entitled to consider myself a worker. (*Laughter and a voice: "Let us fetch him out!"*) I go back to prison to-morrow for two years with renewed courage, which is born of the knowledge that all over the country and the world the spirit of true freedom and service has been re-awakened.

## SPEECHES

### ROBERT SMILLIE (*Chairman*)

This meeting is the outcome of a series of meetings welcoming the Russian Revolution which have been held in different parts of the country. I think the promoters of the great Albert Hall meeting in London deserve the thanks of the democracy of this country. (*Cheers.*) They seized the psychological moment. Now it has been thought wise to concentrate the enthusiasm that has been evinced in every part of the country in this great central Conference, representative of the democracy and of organised Labour in this country. I don't think it would have been possible to have held meetings such as have been held in London, Manchester, Glasgow, and the other great centres, nor this great representative Conference, had it not been for the Russian Revolution. We in this country had reached the stage at which we were not in a position to call our souls our own. The right to call our bodies our own had gone a considerable time before. If it is a right thing that the Russian people are to be congratulated on securing their freedom, surely it cannot be a wrong thing for Britain to desire freedom also. Now, we have not come here to talk treason. We have come here to talk reason. (*Cheers.*) I am glad to know that practically all opposition has been removed so far as the first three resolutions are concerned. Surely no person in this meeting or in this city or in Great Britain can now afford to refuse to send congratula-

tions to our comrades in Russia. I don't see how there can be any reasonable objection to the demand for a restatement of foreign policy and war aims. As for the third resolution, civil liberty to me is one of the most important things in the world. Without civil liberty life is not worth living. We haven't civil liberty in this country now. ("Hear, hear.") I come to the last resolution. Our soldiers are inarticulate. They have no organisation to advocate their claims and to call attention to their grievances. Does anyone say there is no need for such an organisation to be set up? Has the treatment of the relatives and dependents of those at the Front been so good up to the present time that nothing further need be done? Has the treatment of the soldiers themselves at the Front, or when they were wounded, or when they were retired from the Army—has it been all that could be desired? There must be a closer link between the civil population and the military population.

We want to endeavour to concentrate the opinion and will of the people in this country on peace. (*Loud cheers.*) I think it is fairly well agreed now that the Central Powers cannot knock out the Allies or the Allies knock the Central Powers out. When peace comes—even if it is forty, fifty, or sixty years hence—it will be peace by negotiation. (*Cheers.*) Is there any use in murdering a few millions more of the sons of the people? ("No.") We want a lasting peace, and a lasting peace cannot and will not be brought about by kings and negotiators. Such a peace can be made only by the common people. (*Cheers.*) I have no desire to see Russia make a separate peace at the present time. But the Russian people are perfectly entitled to tell us that they have stated their aims perfectly clearly. They are entitled to ask us to state our position equally clearly. If we and France and Italy join with America and Russia in denouncing Imperialism and annexation, I believe the German Government would be forced by public opinion in Germany to negotiate on similar terms, or the German people would take the step which has been taken by the Russians. (*Cheers.*)

## THE FIRST RESOLUTION RUSSIA HAIL!

*[[This Conference of Labour, Socialist, and Democratic organisations of Great Britain hails the Russian Revolution. With gratitude and admiration it congratulates the Russian people upon a Revolution which has overthrown a tyranny that resisted the intellectual and social development of Russia, which has removed the standing menace of an aggressive imperialism in Eastern Europe, and which has liberated the people of Russia for the great work of establishing their own political and economic freedom on a firm foundation, and of taking a foremost part in the international movement for working-class emancipation from all forms of political, economic, and imperialist oppression and exploitation.]*

Moved by J. RAMSAY MACDONALD, M.P.; seconded by Mrs. MONTEFIORE.

### J. RAMSAY MACDONALD

I think there will be no minority upon this resolution. It is fashionable in some quarters in this country to say, We congratulate the Russians upon the

Revolution, but in some respects we regret it. (*Laughter.*) But to-day we congratulate the Russians on the Revolution without any reservations whatever. We do it not because the Revolution has happened, but because for years we wanted it to happen. We are glad not because we are compelled to be glad—"Hear, hear"; and *laughter*)—but because it is in accordance with our democratic principles to be glad. The Revolution did not come in a night. ("Hear, hear.") Never has precious harvest been sown with more precious seed. ("Hear, hear.") The best of the women of Russia, the best of the men of Russia, the young women and the young men, laying down their lives that liberty might be advanced in their native land—all that story of oppression, all that long tale of martyrdom, is drawn like a trail of blood across the history of Russia, at last bursting out into a great flood of light and hope, not only for Russia, thank God, but for the whole of the world. (*Cheers.*) Our congratulations are absolutely unstinted and unqualified. ("Hear, hear.") And what has it done for Russia itself? The moment the Revolution came the gates of the prisons were unbarred—(*cheers*)—censorships were abolished, and the light of reason allowed to play upon the problems of the world. Russia for the first time was free to speak, free to think, free to act; and that freedom has sweetened and ennobled the thoughts of mankind. (*Cheers.*)

The old Russian Government was a sink of corruption. It was the most corrupt of all the Governments of Europe. St. Petersburg was the nursery of the very worst forms of diplomacy, the garden where the worst traditions of diplomacy were carefully watered and nurtured. Its policy was bound ultimately to make for war. All was restless, all was untrustworthy, all was unsafe, all was criminal. When this war broke out organised Labour in this country lost the initiative. ("Hear, hear.") It became a mere echo of the old governing classes' opinions. ("Hear, hear.") Now the Russian Revolution has once again given you the chance to take the initiative yourselves. Let us lay down our terms, make our own proclamations, establish our own diplomacy, see to it that we have our own international meetings. Let us say to the Russian democracy, "In the name of everything you hold sacred in politics, in morality, in good government, and in progress, restrain the anarchy in your midst, find a cause for unity, maintain your Revolution, stand by your liberties, put yourselves at the head of the peoples of Europe." (*Cheers.*)

### Mrs. MONTEFIORE

I am proud to be able to second this resolution of greeting to our Russian comrades in their successful Revolution against imperialism and against all the evil forces that bound their nation. "Russia is in the act of creating a new world"—I am quoting from a capitalist paper of yesterday, which added that it did not think the moment was propitious for this act of creation. (*Laughter.*) I read yesterday a letter from a young officer in the trenches: "One of the greatest tragedies of the war is to see the idealist laying down his life for a peace that is to be arranged by the materialist." Our soldiers are thinking furiously. Our part is to see that peace is not made by materialists. ("Hear, hear.") This meeting I hold to be a consecration of ourselves. Every resolution on the programme to-day asks for action. The democratic power that can end this war



and bring in peace can also bring in the Co-operative Commonwealth. (*Cheers.*) Are you prepared to mobilise for the great fight at the end to do away with wage slavery? (*Cheers.*) You are then from to-day each consecrated and mobilised in that army. Each one going away can get your five, ten, twenty, one hundred followers.

*The Chairman said that the Irish comrades present wished to have the words "and Ireland" inserted after "Great Britain," as hailing the Russian Revolution. This being agreed to the resolution was carried unanimously.*

## THE SECOND RESOLUTION FOREIGN POLICY

*This Conference of Labour, Socialist, and Democratic organisations of Great Britain hails with the greatest satisfaction the declaration of the foreign policy and the war aims of the Russian Provisional Government, and it shares with them the firm conviction that the fall of Tsardom and the consolidation of democratic principles in Russia's internal and external policy will create in the democracies of other nations new aspirations towards a stable peace and the brotherhood of nations. In that belief we pledge ourselves to work for an agreement with the international democracies for the re-establishment of a general peace which shall not tend towards either domination by or over any nation, or the seizure of their national possessions, or the violent usurpation of their territories—a peace without annexations or indemnities and based on the rights of nations to decide their own affairs; and as a first step towards this aim we call upon the British Government immediately to announce its agreement with the declared foreign policy and war aims of the democratic Government of Russia.*

Moved by PHILIP SNOWDEN, M.P.; seconded by E. C. FAIRCHILD.

### PHILIP SNOWDEN

The enthusiasm of this great gathering tempts a speaker to forget that this is something more than a demonstration. It is a convention called for calm and serious consideration of very important questions, and without detracting from the importance of other resolutions upon the paper. I venture to submit that the resolution I now move is one of the gravest urgency and importance. It is a resolution which asks this Convention to accept the declaration made three days ago by the congress of Russian soldiers, demanding in the name of the men in the trenches that every effort should be put forward to bring this bloody war to an end at the earliest possible moment. For three years this great struggle has been going on. We were told by a member of the War Cabinet a few days ago that forty-six millions of the manhood of Europe have already been killed or wounded, and the only talk we get from our statesmen to-day is about preparations for the continuation of the war even next year and the following year. ("Shame.") For three years we have been appealing to the Government to tell us their peace terms. The time has now come for us to tell the Government what our peace terms are. (*Cheers.*) The resolution I propose adopts almost the identical phraseology of the first declaration of the Russian Workmen's and Soldiers' Council. That declaration was afterwards accepted and embodied in

a note to the Allied Powers by the Provisional Government. It declares that the war must be brought to an end as soon as possible by an international understanding between the democracies, and that the basis of peace should be no annexation and no indemnity, and the right of every nation to dispose of its own destiny. What do the Russians mean by "no annexation"? They have very clearly and very explicitly stated that they mean that no territory which has been conquered during the war shall be retained after the war by the right of that conquest alone. In the debate in the House of Commons both the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Asquith accepted the general formula, but placed their own interpretation upon it. Lord Robert Cecil, whilst saying that he agreed that there should be no annexation, and whilst repudiating all Imperialist aims and ambitions on the part of the British Government—(laughter)—refused to concede one single word of alteration in the Allied Note which was sent in reply to President Wilson four months ago. Mr. Asquith, while accepting the formula "no annexation," went on to point out four conditions under which annexation would be justified, two of which were the annexation of territory for strategical security and purposes, and the liberation of subject peoples groaning under the tyranny of an alien oppressor. (Loud laughter.) Both Mr. Asquith and Lord Robert Cecil, while accepting the formula of "no annexation," demand the annexation of 400,000 square miles of territory held by Germany in Africa before the war. And Lord Robert Cecil justifies it by the condition laid down by Mr. Asquith, that this is not imperialism, but is part of the fulfilment of that diverse mission which has been laid upon the British people to release the oppressed wherever they may be found. (Laughter and cries of "Ireland!") In dealing with the question of indemnities, Lord Robert Cecil even added a demand to those in the Allied Note—a possible claim for indemnity on account of shipping losses.

I think we all agree that if a permanent peace is to be established there will have to be readjustment of territory. But the Russian declaration provides for that by giving to all peoples the right to dispose of their own destiny. There you have the method by which you can settle all these questions of Alsace-Lorraine, of Poland, of Austria, and of the Balkans. (A voice: "Ireland.") I might now add Egypt and India. No annexation, therefore, means no transfer of any territory against the will of the people concerned. It means that instead of foreign policy being conducted in the secret courts of diplomacy, instead of so-called peace settlements being made by the men who made the war, the peace will be a people's peace.

## E. C. FAIRCHILD

At this Convention, the very greatest that we have had in this country since the days of Chartism, we are assembled to place ourselves and the working classes of this country in accord with the working classes of Russia, and we hope eventually with the working classes of all countries in the world. We are here to affirm that the future of the world does no longer depend upon its statesmen but upon the decisions of the working people. Let it be clearly understood that every nation has an equal right with ourselves to a place in the sun. The peace must be on the basis of no annexation and no indemnity. With regard to in-

demnities, may I say that all the nations involved in this war have a common liability. (*Cheers.*) Who can say who is responsible for the devastation of Poland, where opposing armies have crossed the country? Who can say who should be responsible for the restoration of Serbia? Who can say who has caused the devastation on the Western Front? Furthermore, let me remind you that by the imposition of indemnities you only increase the economic burdens of the working classes, and, on the other side, let us remember always that indemnities are a device of imperialist capitalism in order to further its own process of exploitation. All the nations of the world are composed of men with equal rights, and only on that groundwork, the groundwork of the declaration of our Russian comrades, can the peace that we desire be secured. Only a few days ago, in the Chamber of Deputies, it was said that the peace must be a French peace. A French peace no more commends itself to the workers of the world than does a German peace. (*Loud cheers.*) We must have a people's peace. It is not for the workers of all countries to call upon the Germans to overthrow their Government. We have our business here; your business is with our Government. (*Cheers.*)

### W. O'BRIEN

In Ireland you have a small nationality at your doors which is demanding its right to live its own life in its own way. We in Ireland were never humbugged by that chaff about the "rights of small nationalities." I gather, from reading some of the capitalist newspapers, that revolution is popular nowadays. Twelve months ago you had a revolution in Ireland. The papers and the politicians that acclaimed the revolution in Russia did not acclaim the revolution in Ireland, where the leaders were taken out and shot like dogs . . . one of them some of you knew—James Connolly. I appeal for you to help us to obtain the release of the 127 political prisoners who are men, and for the one woman who is also imprisoned. She belongs to the aristocracy of Ireland; but she left her class and her family in order to fight with the working class. The men have one privilege, inasmuch as they can talk to one another for an hour a day. She has no one to talk to; she is alone, and is treated as if she was one of the worst of criminals. I ask you to help to obtain her release. The Russian Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates say they want to hear the voice of every section in every country, but will the voice of Ireland be heard? Will the Government allow it? I think this Conference will do a good deal to help us in getting there.

### RODEN BUXTON

A great democratic wave is passing, not only through this country, but through all the countries that are at war. The Russians have led the way, and the wave has overflowed the boundaries of Russia and has penetrated into Germany. The great democratic constitutional movement is making its headway there. Look at the position in Austria where the Parliament has been summoned. The demand for the democratic franchise in Hungary can no longer be resisted. Things are moving. In Italy they are discussing a people's peace. It is coming to the fore in every direction. America is not going to fight for imperialistic aims. (*A voice: "Question."*) It will not do so if we lead the way. There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.

We have to take advantage of that tide to-day. Our opponents represent the ebbing tide, but we represent the rising tide. (*Cheers.*)

*At the hour for the lunch adjournment, Mr. TUPPER (Seamen's Union) rose to speak. His reference to "Mr. Chairman and comrades" evoked cries of "Withdraw 'comrades.'" The Chairman, appealing for order, asked the Conference to have some dignity about it. The gallant captain continued:—*

### Mr. TUPPER

I want to raise the question of the merchant seamen who have lost their lives by being torpedoed whilst bringing food to this country. If there are no indemnities, who will be responsible for reimbursing the widows and orphans of the merchant seamen? (*Cries of "The shipowners."*) I can understand you saying shipowners, but they will not do so. (*Cries of "Make them."*) I want to know whether this country is to be saddled with the cost of keeping the widows and children of men who have been foully murdered while bringing food to this country. (*Further disorder, in which the Chairman again appealed for order.*) I want to say this, that the seamen understand warfare as well as anyone else, and what they are asking is: "What right have the enemy, after they have torpedoed a ship, to shell the men in the open boats. Furthermore, may I ask if this Conference will compel the shipowners to pay? (*Cries of "Yes."*) I have said many times in my life in leading strikes that I would compel the shipowners to do this, that, and the other thing. Have we been able to do it? (*Cries of "Yes."*) I say no.

### E. BEVIN

I am here to-day, elected not by an Executive of a Union, but by the General Conference of our Union. I have not been instructed how to vote on any resolution, and therefore I shall regard it as an obvious and imperative duty to try and convert my own Union to what I am voting for here to-day. Now, supposing the resolutions become the policy, we will say of a large majority of the Labour movement in this country, and that it is then forced upon the Government. Where do our fatuous friends of the I.L.P. stand with their Bermondsey resolution? When we have arrived at this policy and have associated ourselves with our Russian friends, and there is no response from Germany, will they join in a vigorous prosecution of the war until Germany *does* respond? Our experience of the German Social Democrats in the past was not altogether a happy one. Then, has any evidence come to this country that the German Social Democrats are prepared to reverse their policy? I am not a pacifist, but I object to the present alignment of forces. (*Applause.*) That is all. I am prepared to fight for the principles that I hold. And what is the taking of my life in comparison with the future emancipation of the people from which I came? ("Hear, hear.") We all know that in the industrial world the capitalists would give us peace to-morrow if we would surrender. But I am not going to surrender. I am not going to be a pacifist in the industrial movement. I believe that even in our own country there will have to be the shedding of blood to attain the freedom we require. It is easy to reel off that the people of Alsace-Lorraine shall have a plebiscite vote. We haven't been told how that plebiscite vote is to be taken. No mention has been made as to whether they are prepared to put the question

of Africa to a plebiscite vote of the natives of Africa. No mention has been made as to whether the Crown Colonies are to be given a plebiscite vote as to whether they shall decide their form of Government. No mention has been made as to whether they are prepared with all their forces to advocate what means dismemberment of this Empire in order to give the people the right to decide their own form of government. The platform says that "the tide is on the rise for us." For whom? The professional politicians of the Labour Party. (*Disorder, during which the chairman said, "Your time is up, Mr. Bevin."*)

## TOM MANN

I desire to congratulate heartily all responsible for bringing this gathering into existence. I hold that it was absolutely essential in the truest interests of the Labour movement and of the country generally that there should be an expression of opinion given at the present time. I am quite sure from my own knowledge that there has been a vast change in the opinion of organised labour and what has hitherto been presented to the nation as its opinion. However true it might have been, it certainly is not true now. There can be no two opinions as to what Russia is demanding. For my part I don't find a single sentence in the resolution that clashes with any belief I have ever held. Why, we have advocated Internationalism a thousand times ten thousand and every other principle contained in the resolution. And if a man should say that he doubts whether they are prepared to behave justly according to their opportunities towards the little nations—say, like Belgium, Serbia, Roumania, Poland, or other countries—can any sane person question their desire and their deep-seated, whole-souled determination? Let us declare now whether we are in favour of these main principles contained in the Russian manifesto issued in May, 1917, principles very well expressed in this resolution. Let us urge France to do the same thing, but before we cry out to France, let us do it ourselves. (*Cheers.*)

*The resolution was carried with two or three dissentients.*

## THE THIRD RESOLUTION CIVIL LIBERTIES

*This Conference calls upon the Government of Great Britain to place itself in accord with the democracy of Russia by proclaiming its adherence to and determination to carry into immediate effect a charter of liberties establishing complete political rights for all men and women, unrestricted freedom of the Press, freedom of speech, a general amnesty for all political and religious prisoners, full rights of industrial and political association, and the release of labour from all forms of compulsion and restraint.*

Moved by C. G. AMMON; seconded by Mrs. DESPARD.

## C. G. AMMON

I think it would be well if we refreshed our memories as to what exactly the Russian charter of freedom does and so realise what we have lost. It establishes

an immediate amnesty for political and religious offences; it establishes freedom of speech, the Press, Labour organisation and the right to strike. Unless we can take them in defiance of the present Administration, do we enjoy any one of these liberties? Many of the best public-spirited men are lying in prison—men like John Maclean, who is now entering upon the second year of his imprisonment. Will you let him go through a third year? ("No.") We have learned recently that seventy-four British subjects have been interned without trial, without any public examination. Recently, Lord Shaw of Dunfermline has pointed out that it is quite possible under present regulations for a victim to be "regulated" to prison or even to the scaffold. We don't realise it and have not taken it seriously enough. In this war for freedom, freedom is a memory and Labour is enchained. What about the treatment of conscientious objectors? Nearly one thousand absolutist conscientious objectors are in prison, some doing their third, some their fourth terms. They will be kept in prison unless we do what Russia has done. (*Cheers.*) Do you know that at the present time the British Government is running what is known as a propaganda department? That department publishes in neutral and Allied countries literature, magazines, and illustrations purporting to give the public spirit, the war spirit of England! Wait a moment; these same publications *must not circulate in this country.* (*Loud laughter.*) Remember that it was from the blood of their martyrs, from the persecutions, the imprisonments, that the good fruit of the Russian Revolution came; perhaps this, too, is the seed of the revolution in this country. (*Cheers.*)

### Mrs. DESPARD

We did not have much liberty before the war, but now, when our young men have been sent to the trenches or to prison, we are allowing all liberties to be taken away. I should like everyone here to-day not only to *feel*, but to go out from this hall with an earnest determination to *act*. I know you do not want very much more talk; you want to get to work. God knows, I am ready for prison. (*Cheers.*) I think it was Ruskin who said: "We shall never have true life, we shall never have true action except from those who are ready to die." I think I feel that spirit in this hall to-day. Let us, in Heaven's name, do something, arrange something, whereby in combination we shall be able to show our power, and make the power of the people tell.

### F. W. PETHICK LAWRENCE

We are here as citizens of the world to stave off world-ruin, and the world-ruin that might be coming upon us will be coming because of false ideals. The first false ideal is that nationalism is something different and antagonistic and superior to internationalism; and the second false ideal is materialism—the idea that materials are worth more than life and material power more than moral power. A third false ideal is that autocracy is better than democracy, which is exemplified in all the losses of liberty which we are suffering at the present time—the loss of the liberty of the person, the loss of the liberty of speech, and, perhaps worse than both, the loss of the liberty of knowledge; the action of the censor on the one hand, and the action of secret diplomacy on the other. It is for us to restore true ideals in place of false. It is for us to put internationalism



in its proper place above, and not below, nationalism; to put interests in their proper place below, and not above, human beings, the men and women of our country. (Applause.)

## BERTRAND RUSSELL

I wish to say a few words about the thousand men now in prison in this country because they believe in the brotherhood of men. ("Hear, hear.") I don't wish so much to plead on their behalf with you as to convey to you on their behalf the profound joy that it is to them, the profound help in the very difficult time that they have to go through, to feel that the seed of freedom which they have tried to sow is now bearing fruit. They who had to begin their battle when the world was very dark, now have the knowledge that the world looks no longer so dark as it did, and the hope and new happiness which has come into the lives of all of us, that also is with them in prison. Clifford Allen, whom I saw during his brief liberty the other day, takes back with him into his prison the knowledge that the world is moving. He told the court-martial that he stands for liberty—(cheers)—as well as for peace. And we who are outside, who by the accident of a few years have failed to have the privilege of standing beside these men, owe it to them to remember how difficult it is for a man anxious to do what he can for his country and for the world to find himself now within prison walls, powerless, unable to help with his counsel, with his enthusiasm, and with his life—able only to sit still within his prison cell. It is that which they feel most, but they and we must know that they have done much to bring about the new state of opinion in this country and the world. It is by their refusal to serve that they have shown the world that it is possible for the individual to stand in this matter of military service against the whole power of the organised State. That is a very great discovery. It is something which enhances the dignity of men, something which makes every one of us feel freer as we look out upon the world. (Applause.)

*At this stage Mr. SMILLIE said he wanted to bring to the memory of the Conference their late comrade KEIR HARDIE.*

*The members thereupon rose in a body and stood silent.*

## THE FOURTH RESOLUTION WORKERS' & SOLDIERS' COUNCILS

*The Conference calls upon the constituent bodies at once to establish in every town, urban, and rural district, Councils of Workmen and Soldiers' Delegates for initiating and co-ordinating working-class activity in support of the policy set out in the foregoing resolution, and to work strenuously for a peace made by the peoples of the various countries, and for the complete political and economic emancipation of international labour. Such Councils shall also watch diligently for and resist every encroachment upon industrial and civil liberty; shall give special attention to the position of women employed in industry and generally support the work of the Trade Unions; shall take active steps to stop the exploitation of food and all other neces-*

saries of life, and shall concern themselves with questions affecting the pensions of wounded and disabled soldiers and the maintenance grants payable to the dependents of men serving with the Army and Navy; and the making of adequate provision for the training of disabled soldiers and for suitable and remunerative work for the men on their return to civil life. And, further, that the conveners of this Conference be appointed a Provisional Committee, whose duty shall be to assist the formation of local Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils and generally to give effect to the policy determined by this Conference.

Moved by W. C. ANDERSON, M.P.; seconded by ROBERT WILLIAMS.

### W. C. ANDERSON, M.P.

I gather from Press reports that this fourth resolution is regarded as the ugly duckling among the resolutions, and therefore I claim for it on that ground your special solicitude and support. ("Hear, hear.") I saw a paragraph the other day in that dear old mid-Victorian journal the *Morning Post*—(laughter)—which states that the fourth resolution is the one that really matters, being more than mere rhetoric. "This resolution is clearly," it says, "a violation of the law as inciting to the subversion of Army discipline and military authorities." ("Hear, hear.") "Those who move such a resolution and those who act on it are liable to severe penalties." (Laughter.) "It is therefore unthinkable that the Government will wittingly permit such action." Well, I move the resolution without any apology of any kind, and if they want criminals (the speaker made a sweep of his arm towards the packed hall), there is a pretty haul of them in this hall. (Cheers.) But I wish to say emphatically that the resolution was not intended to be subversive of military responsibilities. What we do say is that soldiers and workmen alike are men and have the rights of men, and we ask the newspapers to howl until they are black in the face if they so desire. (Cheers.) We shall go on with the work to which we have laid our hands. (Cheers.) If we are going to have justice for the soldiers, for the wives and the widows and the children of the soldiers, and if we are going to have industrial freedom for the workmen, the workman and the soldier must join hands. (Cheers.) Ah, they say, this is revolution. If a revolution be the conquest of political power by an hitherto disinherited class, if revolution be that we are not going to put up in the future with what we have put up with in the past, we are not going to have the shams and the poverty of the past, then the sooner we have revolution in this country the better. (Cheers.) The present Prime Minister has told Labour to be "audacious"—after the war. There is surely need for some little measure of audacity now. If you wait until after the war there will be very little to be audacious about. What this resolution really means is that we are going to set up throughout the country an organisation linking together these common interests. We are going to try first of all to bring into closer and more organic touch the democracy of Britain with the democracy of Russia and with the democracy of every other country. We are declaring that the peace must be a peace made by the peoples, born of the peoples, and with the stamp of the peoples upon it; not, as in the past, a peace that was no peace, made by rulers and diplomats working in secret behind closed doors. (Cheers.) We are building up, taking the first steps to set up the necessary machinery for dealing with the complete



emancipation of international labour. Is there no need for that? ("Yes.") Have our rulers made such a job of Europe to-day that the people need take no hand in working out their own destinies and shaping their own life? We demand the full restitution of civil and industrial liberties; we are asking for a means of taking the food-profiters by the throat. We are asking for an organisation that is going to strengthen Trade Unionism, that is going to have fewer Trade Unions and more combination among workpeople, that is going to strengthen the power of organised Labour and help in every way to enlarge its power. We are going to have an organisation that will care for the broken soldiers and for all the victims of the war. After the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean, the South African, the war-scarred veteran, wearing a medal for valour, minus an arm, minus a limb, has begged his bread in the street. ("Shame.") That is already coming upon us, and power to prevent it will come not from our rulers but from the awakened conscience of the workmen and soldiers themselves. Therefore, we set up an organisation, not subversive, not unconstitutional unless the authorities care to make it so; an organisation which is a definite challenge to tyranny wherever tyranny may show itself. I would like to suggest this further, that in addition to what is proposed in the resolution—and I believe this is the view of those who have organised this meeting—that this Conference itself, in addition to the organisers of the Conference, should elect at least thirteen more members from its own body in order to work upon the central organisation. I ask you this afternoon not to discuss too much the mere method by which it will be done. These methods will be fully worked out by the Provisional Council, and instructions will be given as to the best means for building up committees locally. We want Great Britain to be great in the true sense—great in literature, in science, in art, great in its conquests of poverty and of justice, great in fame, great in its love of liberty and in its faith in liberty. I believe the most important step in that direction will be the setting up of the committees on the lines suggested. I hope this great Conference, which surely represents the breaking of the ice, the ice that has bound our national feeling during the past two and a half years—this great Congress will speak with no uncertain sound and will give us a mandate to go forward with the work which, in my opinion, will mean the winning back of our liberties in this country, the building up and betterment of labour, and the worldwide brotherhood of man. (*Cheers.*)

## ROBERT WILLIAMS

I second the resolution for what it suggests, and for what it implies. I want to read one significant line, the line apparently that has incurred the wrath of the *Morning Post* that Anderson refers to—that the purpose of this committee is to work "for the complete political and economic emancipation of international labour." I want to accept the resolution in its very fullest implication. The resolution, if it means anything at all, means that which is contained in the oft-used phrase from Socialist platforms: *The dictatorship of the proletariat.* (*Cheers.*) I am glad that the Press, the competent Press, the subtle Press, the sinister Press which represents the proprietary interests of this country, have allowed their case against the first three resolutions to go by default, in order to fix themselves steadfastly to the implication of the fourth. My friend Smillie

said we have come here to talk not treason but reason; but I would remind Smillie, if he needs it, that under the Defence of the Realm Regulations reason has become treason. (*Cheers.*) We stand steadfastly by this resolution, and we are not going to weaken it by one jot or tittle. If the governing classes in this country are convinced that you are going to give full and adequate effect to this resolution, they will give effect to resolutions one, two, and three in order to defeat you. You have got the most competent, the most capable governing class of the whole world in this country. (*A voice: "We have beaten them."*) You have not beaten them. They have taken your own leaders from your ranks and used them against you. (*Voices: "Not Smillie."*) After they found that Lord Devonport was unable to deal with the profiteers of this country, they wanted to cover up their slimy tracks by putting Bob Smillie into Grosvenor House. They will make every conceivable sacrifice and concession short of getting off your backs. (*Cheers.*) Mr. Tupper demanded that we should fight for indemnities in order to provide adequate sustenance for the dependents of men who have lost their lives in the mercantile marine. If you want restitution, reparation, and guarantees, in God's name get it from the profiteers of your own country. (*Cheers.*) We want a mandate from you to proceed with this resolution, and if there are many amongst you who have got cold feet about this, slip out before the resolution is put. (*Laughter.*) We want to break the influence of the industrial and political labour "machine"—(*cheers*)—and this Convention is our attempt so to do. To-day hundreds and thousands of miners, engineers, transport workers, railwaymen, and the rest are represented here through their Trade Union lodges. We want these men to go back to their constituents and convince them to use the power that lies in their hands to give or withhold their labour in the place where wealth is produced. Parliament will do nothing for you. Parliament has done nothing for you for the whole period of the war. The workpeople have sacrificed in blood and treasure at all times for their country, and the country is theirs by right of those very sacrifices. They say that you will hamper the production of munitions, that control by the workpeople would mean that our national affairs would be less well managed. Smillie referred to Mr. Lloyd George's indictment of the old gang; but every word of Mr. Lloyd George's indictment of the old gang applies even more pertinently to the new gang. (*Cheers.*) The workpeople have been called upon to make sacrifice after sacrifice; the engineering and highly-skilled occupations have had to dilute and water down their highly-skilled labour; you have been called upon to forego your holidays and work long, tedious hours of overtime. We want to assert our right to the ownership and control of the country. We want to demand the representation of the soldiery, of the millions of organised working people in the Army, which, in the words of Mr. Ben Tillett, contains 95 per cent. of the working classes of this country. We are competent to speak in the name of our own class, and damn the Constitution. (*Loud cheers.*) Had the Russian revolutionaries been disposed to be concerned with the Constitution of Holy Russia the Romanoffs would have been on the throne to-day, and I say to you: Have as little concern for the British Constitution as the Russians you are praising had for the dynasty of the Romanoffs. (*Cheers.*) You have a greater right to speak in the name of our people, civilians and soldiers, than have the gang who are in charge of our political destinies at this moment. It has been said by a German

intellectual that the proletariat is the rock upon which the church of the future shall be built. It is the rock upon which the reactionary forces will break themselves. (*Cheers.*) If you are really sincere in sending greetings to Russia, I say to you: "Go thou and do likewise." (*Cheers.*) The need for far-reaching, for revolutionary changes is as great in this country as it was in Russia. The work-people have assumed the directorate of matters in Russia. "Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains, and you have the world to win." (*Cheers.*)

### Mrs. PHILIP SNOWDEN

One of the most poisonous of lies from a perjured Press during the war has been the impression they have endeavoured to convey that the movement which we represent was antagonistic to the soldiers and their interests. It is because we care so much for the men who are compelled to sacrifice their lives, which ought to be lived out under God's sun to a blessed end, that we are seeking their comradeship and support and working for them now. I understand from those who know the Russian language that the word "workmens," in the title of our resolution, is a loose translation of a better Russian word "workers." ("Hear, hear.") I make that point only for this reason—that it was not meant by the use of the word "workmens" to keep off those councils suitable women if elected to them. (*Cheers.*) The Russian Revolution owes as much to women as to men. The Russian revolutionaries are honouring women by placing them upon their councils; they are doing common justice to the women by giving them the vote. Keep up your hearts when this Conference is over, and you have to meet the dismal people who can see no light ahead. Get ahead with the formation of our council, and end the war at the speediest possible moment. (*Loud applause.*)

### SYLVIA PANKHURST

I trust you will all support this resolution, because it is an attempt to make a straight cut for the Socialist Commonwealth that we all want to see. I believe that this Provisional Committee will be the Provisional Government, like the Russian Socialist Government, some day; and I am very glad to feel that at last we shall come out of this slough of despond, and that the workers will be united in common action. We have had resolutions which have talked about "encroachments upon liberty," but we have never had real liberty in this country. What we want to do is to extend the bounds of liberty further and further. The revolution in Russia is not only political but also industrial. I hope you are going to see to it that some of the women you choose are those sweated workers and the mothers who live in the hovels and slums. I hope you are not going to leave them out when you form your Committees and your Central Government. (*Cheers.*)

### FRED SHAW

As one of the rank and file I support this resolution because of its revolutionary possibilities. The time is ripe for the working classes to take things into their own hands and follow Russia. This war has driven out of the minds of the workers many of the old middle-class ideas about the State. We must go forward and ignore all the coercion that the Capitalist State can bring upon us.

## R. C. WALLHEAD

I impress upon you the necessity for the formation of committees of this description in order to see that justice is done, not only to men who may come back from the front, but also to the people who remain at home. I belong to the fatuous I.L.P., a party whose record shines as bright as the record of any political party in the country, and who have done as much to preserve working-class freedom and Trade Union freedom as any Trade Union leaders have done. We had some talk of indemnities this morning. You will pay an indemnity, but it will be an indemnity to the winning class in your own country. I believe that these new committees are necessary, and I believe that from them will spring a new democratic force that will begin to rebuild this country for the people. (Applause.)

## J. SANDERS

I represent a Union who have just come through a strike and are never happy unless we are in a strike. I do hope that the forming of these committees will not be left to those on the platform alone. We have men and women in the body of this hall who are anxious and willing to take part in this great struggle which has got to come. It is not because we don't want them to have all the praise, but we don't want them to have all the danger. I ask the conveners of this meeting to allow members in the body of this hall to participate in this innovation which is going to have such far-reaching effects.

*Mrs. CRESSWELL, from Poplar, voiced the hope of women in the East-End that the working woman would be represented on the Council.*

## J. TOOLE

I was instructed to support the three previous resolutions. I am very sorry to interfere with the harmony of the meeting, but at the same time it is my duty to point out, as representing a certain section of opinion, that there are already sufficient organisations to do the work which has been outlined—Trades Councils, local Labour Parties, Socialist organisations, and various other organisations. Russia and this country suffer from entirely different sets of circumstances. In Russia the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates was only established when the monarchy and autocracy had been overthrown. You will have to be very careful that you put on this committee only men over military age.

## W. GALLACHER

This Conference seems to be agreed that the Russian Revolution is definitely settled, but is it? No. The Russian Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates have the biggest fight on, not against the capitalists of Russia, but against the capitalists of other countries who have determined that the Socialists of Russia have to be beaten back. Give your own capitalist class in this country so much to do that it will not have time to attend to it.

## NOAH ABLETT

So far we have heard ideas we have heard thousands of times before, and with which we all agree. There is no need for further discussion. But I think

there should be before us some sort of programme, some sort of practical suggestion of how we are to set up the Councils.

*The resolution was then put to the meeting, and carried amid enthusiasm with only two or three dissentients.*

*It was agreed that the following reply should be sent to the Russian Workmen and Soldiers' Council:—*

*"The largest and greatest Convention of Labour, Socialist and democratic bodies held in Great Britain during this generation has to-day endorsed Russia's declaration of foreign policy and war aims, and has pledged itself to work through its newly constituted Workmen's and Soldiers' Council for an immediate democratic peace. The Convention received your telegram of congratulation with gratitude and enthusiasm."*

*The Convention decided that the country should be divided into thirteen districts, each of which would add a representative to the Provisional Committee.*



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