

of the Movement I shall be able to put forcibly before the Committee your point of view. I think you will appreciate that as a representative of the Trades Union Congress I am only too anxious to carry out the decisions of this great Congress. Hence the reason for my rising in this debate to-day.

★ The Resolution was carried.

Unemployment Assistance Regulations

Mr. Arthur Hayday, M.P. (General Council): I have been asked on behalf of the General Council to make a few preliminary remarks prior to the general discussion upon this very important phase of our work. I am sure the delegates will not need to be reminded as to the magnitude of this problem and its implications, but I have recently been going back a little—I am not going to weary you with any detail—and I have come to the conclusion that the problem is much greater than the general public in this country up to the moment seem to have appreciated. Perhaps I may be permitted also to say that quite a number of the workers themselves have not become sufficiently deeply interested. In some cases there has been the fear that they might become one of the victims, and in other cases there have been prayerful thanks that up to now they have escaped. But if you look at the accumulated effect during the past 15 years, I am sure you will come to the same conclusion that I have reached, namely, that more than one-half of the total population of Great Britain has suffered in consequence of unemployment entering into their homes. Even now, with a registered figure of 1,600,000 unemployed, if you embrace the number of dependants you have a figure of not less than 5,000,000 persons in this country at the moment suffering in consequence of unemployment. When you get to that class that have had to suffer the effects of the tyranny associated with the strengthening of capitalism, and its hold over the lives of the workers, you find there are pretty well 3,000,000 of the population that come within the ambit of the operations of these regulations. I think somewhere about 1,000,000 will come under the direct heading of "signing on," and then you must of course take into account those dependent upon them. That puts every one of us in mind of those words of Goldsmith:—

*All fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.*

You will hear in the course of the discussion the extent to which that decay has set in with greater devastating effect than any plague that has yet visited these or any other shores. When devastating plagues destroy a thousand people or so, the whole world is staggered, and the whole world is ready to fly to their assistance by giving adequate sustenance to recover and rebuild and rehabilitate. But when you come to the great number of people affected by the Means Test you find not a desire to rehabilitate, but rather to hide it, and in some cases to look upon the position as hopeless, and to say there must be certain inflictions that will pass away in the course of years, and if you can only tide over that time by a sophistry that will give a measure of temporary consolation, that is all that can be done. Faith is a good thing, but faith does not in itself feed hungry stomachs. Faith does not rehabilitate the human unit: it does not give the opportunity of higher cultural possibilities: it destroys that opportunity. That decay setting in among our people is a thing that should be arrested before its consequences are far too serious.

Perhaps you will forgive me if I take five minutes in recounting the part that we in the Trade Union Movement have endeavoured to play. You will remember that in 1931 the Trades Union Congress put before the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance a scheme under which the unemployed could be provided for on the basis of citizenship without distinction between them. Then the National Government adopted the cruel and unfair system peculiar to their psychology. The household means test was imposed as an economy measure in 1931, and has now become a permanent feature. You know full well that the workers demanded there must be no separation of the victims, no method of treating one section as though they were lepers. I remember some of the phrases used then—that men of a certain age had been unemployed for so long that it would not be long before they became unemployable, and it was necessary that they should be put in a separate category and not become, as some were wicked enough to put it, hangers-on to the unemployment insurance principle. So they were divided into those two sections, and at the moment the one section is exploited to the tune of £5,000,000 a year on the assumption that there is a big debt. You all know how those assumed liabilities were incurred. It is assumed that that debt must be carried by those who are making their contributions, and £5,000,000 a year must go to them, while the others are treated more as though it was a system of beggary. The Government boasted in 1934 that they had established the principle of national responsibility for unemployment, but experience has shown that what they really did was to put the responsibility not upon the nation, but upon the homes of the unemployed. Early in 1935, you will remember, the regulations, in consequence of the revolt of public conscience, only operated for just a few weeks, and had to be withdrawn, and the new regulations were assumed to have rectified all the defects of those regulations. But the new regulations still retained the principle of family responsibility, and not national responsibility, and they tried to mislead the public into believing that because an unemployed person had drawn for a certain period, he should be thrown back upon the sacrifices of members of the family. The pockets of every member of the household were to be carefully and systematically searched; as a matter of fact more systematically and more keenly than the customs officer examines baggage for possible smuggling. Here and there the new regulations may be an improvement upon the old, but while that central principle remains young men and women struggling to get a start in life find themselves saddled with the burden of unemployment, because they happen to live in the same household as somebody unlucky enough to be thrown out of a job through the play of economic forces over which they have absolutely no control. They are, as we have always said, the victims of a vicious economic system. I only wish all those well-intentioned people outside the Trade Union Movement would give us a little more of their practical support, and a little more of their backing through the ballot box, because after all is said and done these things are capable of being remedied when we come down to a measure of sound common sense and real appreciation of our responsibilities and duties. If after all this humiliating pocket-searching inquisition they can find nothing, and there are no resources of any kind, the sum of 10s. a week will be given to an adult single man, or 9s. to an adult woman. This has to keep them not only in food and clothing, but in a state of respectability. I know you feel just as strongly about it as we do, when you have an adult single woman having to live on 9s. a week and having to provide for everything out of that. I will wager that if you search the records during the past few years and study coroners' inquests, you will find instances of many who, rather than sacrifice virtue, have been prepared