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 result of our participation in the Trades Union Congress I am 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 been 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 prayers and thanks that up to now they have escaped. But if you look at the accumulated data during the past 15 years, I am sure you will come to the same conclusion that I have reached, namely, that more than one-tenth of the total population of Great Britain has suffered in consequence of unemployment entering into their homes. Even now, with a registered figure of 1,000,000 unemployed, if you embrace the number of dependants you have a figure of not less than 5,000,000 persons in this country 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 the hold over the lives of the workers, you find that there are pretty well 3,000,000 of the population that come within the ambit of the operations of these regulations. I think it is clear that about 1,000,000 will come under the direct heading of “safety,” 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 have the land, to hardening 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 rates as being a tax that has to be paid; to say there must be certain infestations that will pass away in the course of years, and that you can only take 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 individual; it does not give 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 resuming the part that we in the Trade Union Movement have to play. You will remember that in 1911 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 to them. Then the Government adopted the cruel and unfair system peculiar to their psychology. The Government means test was imposed as an economic measure in 1931, and has now become a permanent feature. It is quite significant that the workers demanad 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 unemployed, and it was necessary that they should be put in a separate category and not become, as some were wicked enough to put it, hangsters in a separate category. 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 their fault. There is a regularity. 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 revolts of public conscience, only operated for just a few weeks, and had to be withdrawn. I am sorry to have to refer to those regulations. But the new regulations still retain 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 family 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 work by 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 can do something by sound common sense and reason. That we refer to our responsibilities and duties. If all after all this humiliating pocket-searching inquiry 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 £4 9s. a week and being forced out of the work that she prefers to that if you search the records during the past few years and study coroner’s inquests, you will find instances of many who, rather than sacrifice virtue, have been prepared.