

The Trade Union Congress

Freedom Press

October, 1890

We are very well pleased with the results of the Liverpool Trade Union Congress. The party of inaction, the "old gang" of place-hunters have been thoroughly worsted by the upholders of the "new" unionism, and the latter have taken a firm hold of the controlling power of the trade unions of this country. The organizations are pledged to a policy of very much greater activity, they have endorsed Socialism to a very considerable extent, they have declared their desire to have an eight hour law passed in the imperial parliament, they have elected John Burns on their parliamentary committee and they have discarded Shipton as parliamentary secretary. The men who in the past criticized the "Do-nothing" party in the severest manner- -criticism by the way which we most heartily endorse--are now themselves commencing to take part in the government of the trade unions and are laying themselves open to criticism. And they will have it, too. The displaced men of the old school, the ambitious members of the S.D.F. who envy the success in agitation of some of their late comrades, the anti-parliamentary trade unionists such as Frank Brien of the Dockers Union, the revolutionary Blanquists of the Socialist League, and the growing Anarchist Party--all these men are very carefully watching our friends the now unionists. So long as they are honest, as we believe most of them are now, however mistaken they may be in the theories by which they guide their actions, they are likely to welcome such criticism as useful to the movement which they have at heart and to profit by it.

The new men have been proclaimed leaders of the skilled and unskilled organizations and they are called upon to prove the truth of their assertions, to secure the adoption of the eight hour law and to see that it results in the advantages which they have foretold. If they press boldly and energetically onwards they will very speedily find that the Anarchist objections which they have pooh-poohed are very real and they will be compelled to make a change of front, throw aside their worship of legality and go in for a complete Social Revolution. The best thing that could happen for the Anarchist propaganda would be for the 8- hour law to be passed tomorrow, for then the workers would very speedily see how unreal are the hopes so many of them place in it now. The danger lies in their patiently waiting for it year after year, whilst machinery is being introduced and throwing more and more of them upon the streets to starve. But we do not think the new men an likely to linger long upon the parliamentary road. As the Social Democrat who writes the leading articles in the *Daily Chronicle* says, "there obviously exists a great danger for the State in the near future. The Trade Union Congress will not for ever be content to appeal in vain for legislative remedies. Already a considerable section of the advanced

party has ceased to take a healthy interest in Parliament and its doings, and if Parliament does not speedily and effectively mend its ways that party will grow apace. Now there is but one step between contempt for legislators and contempt for laws and it is easily taken, and being taken signifies Anarchy. Collectivism, whether economically sound or not, is a system that recognizes laws and law makers; but hope too long deferred will assuredly make the Collectivist heart sick."

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