WILEY

Industrial Congresses

Author(s): John Rae

Source: *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Dec., 1891), pp. 798-803

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Royal Economic Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2956099>

Accessed: 26-06-2016 07:50 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Royal Economic Society, *Wiley* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to
The Economic Journal

Redemption in silver would at its present price mean large profit for the Treasury.

Some very striking evidence as to the evil effect of rising prices on the interests of workmen was given by Mr. J. D. Warner, and Mr. Knox, formerly Comptroller of Currency, completely refuted the often-repeated statement that the Act of 1873 was carried through Congress in secrecy by giving a full history of the passage of the measure.

It is difficult to understand the origin of the following statements. 'In 1857 Germany abandoned gold and adopted silver'! (Report, p. 3.) 'Fifteen to one is the ratio in India with free coinage, and open mints at Calcutta and Bombay'! (Evidence, p. 289).

C. F. BASTABLE

INDUSTRIAL CONGRESSES.

THE Autumn Labour Congresses won more public attention than usual this year. First came the International Socialist Labour Congress which assembled at Brussels in the end of August, on the invitation of the Belgian Socialist Labour Party, and was attended by 400 delegates from 13 different countries, including 29 from England. It was chiefly remarkable (1st) for reuniting, if only for a week, the estranged fractions of revolutionary Socialism, French Marxists, Possibilists, and Blanquists, German Social Democrats, English Socialists of the League, and English Socialists of the Federation; (2nd), for the presence of delegates from a few English trade unions, including old unions like the Cabinet-makers and the London Compositors, as well as unions of the newer order, like the Seamen and Firemen, and the Navvies, which are known to be more or less socialist in their feeling; and (3rd), for the spectacle of a united Socialism openly turning its back on revolution and revolutionists, and stretching out both hands for an alliance with English trade unions on the basis of a moderate and practicable policy. Anarchists were not even invited to the Congress, and its first three morning sittings were taken up with the expulsion or exclusion of Anarchist delegates, who had come all the way from France, Italy, and Spain to attend it. On the other hand, the English trade unions were invited and were at one time expected to send representatives, though only very few of them actually did so, the rest thinking the objects of the Congress too uncertain; and the Secretary of the Congress explained that it was possible to co-operate with English trade unionists, notwithstanding they were not all Socialists, because they believed in the two great principles of working-class organization and State intervention; but it was not possible to co-operate with Anarchists, even though they were Socialist in principle, because they would have nothing to say to organization, or State, or anything but revolution and dynamite. Co-operation, however, is not merely working with common instruments, but for common objects, so that this explanation already implies that Socialists are at present of

the mind to work rather with trade unionists in mending the present system of things than with Anarchists in ending it. Then the German Socialist leader Bebel, in his speech, frankly admitted that they had come to a new understanding on this matter in Germany, and were now going to take up practical social questions, instead of revolutionizing, while his colleague Liebknecht mildly poohpoohed as mere dreaming even the gentler idea of a universal strike to be made on the outbreak of the first European war, which is a cherished fancy in some Socialist circles, and was suggested at the Congress by the Dutch agitator Nieuwenhuis. In this spirit, then, the main business of the Congress was to pass two general resolutions for making ordinary remedial legislation and trade union action more effective. The one recommended the working men of all countries to institute a permanent Commission of Inquiry into the conditions of labour, and make every use of their power as electors to secure remedial legislation; and the other recommended them all to join the trade unions of their respective trades, to observe great care and prudence in resorting to strikes and boycotting, and to constitute in every country where it is practicable a general secretariat of labour, to be a medium of communication between the working men of different countries and prevent them hurting one another on the outbreak of strikes. The rest of the business of the Congress was not of much moment. It recommended the 1st of May rather than the first Sunday of May for the International Eight-hour Demonstration, and it passed various abstract resolutions against militarism, piecework, sub-contracting, and sexual inequality in political and civil rights; but it refused to condemn the Russian persecution of the Jews, on the ground that that was a question of nationality and not of class.

A fortnight later the English trade unions held their twenty-fourth annual Congress at Newcastle. It was the largest and most powerful they have yet held, consisting of 620 delegates, with a membership of 1,302,855 behind them; and it received unaccustomed marks of established public respect. It enjoyed the official presence of the Mayor and Magistrates, the unofficial presence of Ministers and Ex-Ministers of State, and its real dignity was even better asserted by an opening address from its President, Mr. Burt, M.P., which for pith of sense, high tone, and terse phrase has won universal admiration. The Trade Union Congress has now an array of business to transact which would require a session of six weeks instead of six days. It had this year more than sixty subjects on the agenda paper, and broke up before it reached the thirtieth. The most absorbing question was the eight-hours' day, on which the Congress voyaged about curiously between yes and no for two days, first repeating by a more decisive majority its resolution of last year in favour of a Parliamentary enactment; then, by a still larger majority, qualifying that resolution by a second, declaring that 'any Bill for reducing the hours of labour should be of

a permissive character, and should not be put in operation without the consent of two-thirds of the organized members of any trade ;' and finally, replacing this by another resolution, a little more favourable to compulsion, to the effect that ' legislation relating to the hours of labour be enforced on all trades and occupations, save where a majority of the organized members of any trade or occupation protest by ballot-vote against the same.' The last vote lay thus between two varieties of the trade option principle, and the one which triumphed not only reduces the required consent from two-thirds to a bare majority of a union, but makes the law compulsory on trades that have no union, and permissive only on trades that have one. Much contention has been raised because the words ' eight-hours,' which seem to have stood in the last resolution as it was originally read to the Congress by its mover, were omitted from it in the copy delivered to the Chairman and incorporated in the minutes ; but the words ' eight-hours ' are not in the other motion either, and are not needed, because both motions were obviously of the nature of riders on the previous general resolution in favour of an eight-hours' Act, and not of substitutes for it ; and the circumstance would not have been worth referring to but for the fact that men like Mr. Burt seem to lend countenance to the suggestion that the omission was the result of private arrangement, and secured the support of the 80 or 90 representatives of the cotton trade. But if it were known to 80 or 90 people from the first, it would never have taken weeks to get about ; and besides there is no reason because a trade like the cotton trade prefers union agency to State agency, why it should therefore prefer union action, fettered by a two-thirds majority, to union action by a bare majority. The voting was as follows : the motion for an eight-hours' law was carried by 232 to 163, the amendment, making the law permissive, by 242 to 156, and the final amendment, making it permissive by a majority rather than two-thirds by 285 to 183, and when afterwards put as a substantive motion, by 341 to 73. It would seem, therefore, that 73 members were opposed to all eight-hour legislation, 156 in favour of the unconditional and universal eight-hours' law, 150 did not vote, and the remaining 200 odd prefer the trade option compromise. Trade option is not held, however, as a rigid principle, for the Miners' Eight-hours' Bill was approved by the Congress at a subsequent sitting, by the large majority of 290 to 50.

The remaining business of the Congress, which rarely occasioned controversy, was concerned either with proposed extensions or amendments of the Factory Acts and similar legislation, or with measures for strengthening the political and civil position of the working class. It was agreed to demand the application of the Factory Acts to laundries, public works and buildings in course of construction, and domestic workshops (defined as places in which one or more persons work for hire or wage), the appointment of more inspectors, the extension of the Fishing Boat Acts to other steam fishing vessels besides trawlers, the abolition of Sunday fishing where practicable, the raising of the age of

half-timers in the textile trades to thirteen. Then resolutions were passed in favour of the payment of members of parliament and local bodies, of the formation of a Labour Party (though the Congress refused to sanction the creation of a special parliamentary election fund to be raised by voluntary penny contributions); of a law extending the right to sit on juries to all parliamentary electors, and paying them 10s. a day for their services; of a law giving representatives of trade unions the right to be present at coroners' inquests on deceased members of the union; of an amendment to the Conspiracy Act, clearly restricting intimidation to threats of violence; of a law requiring that no Government or Municipal contract be given to any firm that does not conform to trade union hours and rates of wages. The Congress further demanded the abolition of the common employment doctrine in the Employers' Liability Bill, and the requirement of certificates of competency for engineers in charge of steam-engines and boilers; but it rejected, by 129 to 107, the proposal for a State Board of Arbitration, being unwilling, in spite of the growing love for the State, with which it is credited, to give up to it the freedom of trade action.

Among the subjects the Congress had no time to overtake were State superannuation of workmen over sixty, and Mr. Ben Tillet's scheme of municipal workshops.

The special subject of accidents to workmen occupied the attention of an International Congress of experts, as they may be called—government officials, statisticians, economists, inspectors of factories and mines, employers of labour, and others—some 300 members in all, who sat for a week at Berne in the same month of September, under the presidency of the Swiss Foreign Minister, M. Numa Droz. Papers were read by persons of reputation upon the legislation and experience of their respective countries. Differences of opinion appeared about State intervention, and it is reported that during the progress of the sittings, the feeling in favour of such intervention gained ground. But the conclusions arrived at are somewhat general. For preventive measures, the Congress recommended a combination of individual initiative with that of association and of the State; for remedial measures the organization of a system of insurance on the plan best suited to each country. In working out this system it recommended joining accidents of temporary effects with sick insurance, and accidents of permanent effects with old age insurance; and it ended by calling upon the various governments to prepare more thorough statistics of accidents and disease, and by appointing a permanent committee of its own to investigate existing international statistics on the subject, and report to next Congress.

In October the German Socialist party held its general Congress at Erfurt. Two hundred and forty-five delegates attended, and the Government, though not otherwise interfering, was represented by the commissioner of police and two official shorthand writers. The only

business done of any general interest was the adoption of a new programme, and a debate on the tactics of the party. The programme was adopted in a lump without a word of discussion on the last day of the sittings and is identical with the draft published in this *Journal* last quarter, except for the addition of one or two minor articles, such as the abolition of capital punishment, free burial, and the repeal of all laws interfering with the equal rights of women. The debate on tactics lasted two days, and brought out essential divisions in the party, but showed an important advance among them in moderation even over last year. The question that really divided them was the question what is now to be done with their Socialism and their revolution? Only five delegates stood up for the old revolutionary tradition, and these five delegates, after much embittered recrimination, resigned their membership to avoid expulsion, and founded next evening in Berlin a party of their own on the old lines. The general feeling of the Congress was that for the present Socialism and revolution must be laid on the shelf. Bebel put the matter very plainly. The party had obtained about a million and a half of votes at last election, but they could not count on more than 200,000 of them as convinced Socialists. The rest cared nothing for the Socialist ideal, but only for this, that, or the other immediate alleviation of their own condition, and they would never, he admitted, have been won to the party at all by preaching the party's ultimate ends. 'The men and the women who come to us to-day,' he said, 'do they come because they wish to carry out the ultimate ends of social democracy? No; that would be a delusion. The immense majority come because they know that the Social Democrats are the only party that has any heart for the working class.' With only 200,000 convinced adherents it was mere folly to think of resorting to force or to dream of instantaneous realisations. They would only become, he said, like the Anarchists—a mere sect with no power at their back. They must first convert their party, get them all, he said, made complete Social Democrats, before they could think of anything further, and then besides, with multitudes won over by nothing but their hopes of redress for the grievances of their every-day life, how can they meanwhile be held together except by trying to get them the redress they want?

The present duty of the party was so far clear—it was to strive for the practical amelioration of present evils. But at this point a new source of division appeared, for while Bebel regarded the new policy as mainly an affair of tactics, useful for gaining working-class votes to the party, and for affording opportunities of applying Socialist criticism to the present system of things, and while he still confidently held out the prospect of a great day of social account and transformation, which he said was so near that very few in that hall would not live to see it, a younger leader, Von Vollmar, a member of the Imperial Diet, and one of the ablest and most active men in the party, contended that the policy of practical amelioration should be

accepted not as a matter of tactics, but as the honest and substantial policy of the party. He declared Bebel's position to be an ambiguous position. He described the old leader's Sibylline prophecy, as he termed it, about the transformation day as the purest fantasy, saying that neither the political nor the economic presuppositions existed for it yet. He put it in the same line with the notions of certain others of their comrades, that the day would come in 1898 or 1893, or with the first European war. Though he professed himself a sincere believer in Socialism, he owned he saw little good in trotting out the old catechism in every speech they delivered, and he urged that they should pursue social reforms for the sake of the reforms themselves, recognising, to use his own words, a gradual and peaceful socialisation by progressive transition as the way prescribed by Nature herself. It is plain therefore that Von Vollmar would banish Socialism and revolution to the next age or even further, and his speech is an important indication how strongly the present constitution and circumstances of the German Socialist party is forcing it into a course of rational and positive reform. The speech, moreover, was well received, frequently and much applauded, and a motion which was made for repudiating the views expressed in it and in previous speeches delivered by the same speaker elsewhere was withdrawn on a threat of his resignation. Liebknecht said Vollmar's policy was Government Socialism, and Bebel said it was National Liberalism, but it is really, as it professed to be, only their own present policy free from ambiguity; and the continuance in the party of Von Vollmar and his friends, together with the simultaneous extrusion of the revolutionary young Berliners surely marks another welcome advance this year in moderation.

JOHN RAE

THE NEW EAST INDIA FACTORY ACT.

THE new East India Factory Act is coming into operation on the 1st of January, amid a cross-fire of complaints from Indian experts, who tell us it does not go far enough to give women the protection they require, and Indian experts, who warn us it will drive women out of factory employment altogether. Some attempt is even made to deny the necessity for any intervention whatever, but that at least seems to be placed beyond reasonable controversy by the revelations contained in the Report of the Bombay Factory Commission of 1884. The great strongholds of over-work are everywhere the season trade and the small mill, and in India the worst excesses were confined to branches of manufacture which were season trades and small mill trades at the same time—the ginning and pressing businesses up-country. These ginning and pressing factories run only eight months in the year, and for two of these they run day and night with a double shift of hands, but during the other six they keep only a single set of hands, and run

3 F 2