

LEADERS OF ELECTRICAL TRADES UNION DEFEATED

ATTITUDE ON HUNGARY CRITICIZED

From Our Labour Reporter

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For the first time in years the Communist leadership of the Electrical Trades Union suffered to-day a decisive defeat at the hands of delegates to their annual conference. At a private session here a motion was carried that the conference was disturbed by the executive's attitude "toward the shooting down of the workers at Poznan, and its belated protest against the attempt by Russian troops to suppress the workers' revolution in Hungary." The resolution placed on record the delegates' belief that trade unionists in any country who had been imprisoned for their trade union activity, or for their struggle against imperialism or dictatorship, merited the support, financial and moral, of the E.T.U.

An amendment which would have deleted the reference to Hungary was defeated by 177 votes to 154, with 40 abstentions. The "belated protest" was a statement issued by the executive last December after a flood of letters to the union's headquarters. It merely regretted the intervention of Soviet troops owing to "past mistakes" by the Hungarian and Soviet Governments, and urged that they should be withdrawn.

"BRUTAL ATTACK"

The delegates then passed, by a show of hands, a motion condemning "the brutal attack of the Soviet armed forces on the Hungarian people," and demanding their withdrawal. This resolution pledged the union's support to the Hungarians in their efforts to obtain a Government of their own choice, free from outside intervention; demanded the release of Hungarians imprisoned "for their part in the fight for Hungarian independence"; and, finally—a bitter pill for the Communist leaders of the union—stated that copies of the resolution were to be sent to the Soviet and Hungarian Embassies in London.

An amendment which would have substituted for all this a mere endorsement of the executive's statement last December was defeated. Taking political motions in private session at all was an unusual step, and one on which the leaders apparently decided at the last moment, possibly after sensing the mood of the delegates; but they had still expected that appeals for unity would avert defeat.

The E.T.U. leaders did not have a much happier time when the delegates, still in private session, heard of the critical condition of the union's finances. For two hours Mr. Frank Haxell, the general secretary, tried to explain how funds which stood at about £1m. a little over six years ago had now fallen to about £350,000. The recent engineering and shipbuilding strikes, he told the delegates, had cost the union £163,000, but some of this had been offset by closing the union's training college and convalescent home, and by other economies.

40-HOUR WEEK

For more than an hour, the delegates hurled questions at the embarrassed executive, but Mr. F. Foulkes, the president, said after the session that he was sure the members were now satisfied. The E.T.U. was neither bankrupt nor inefficient.

Earlier in the day Mr. Foulkes had said in his presidential address that during the wages standstill period in the engineering industry, trade unions must press for a 40-hour working week and a third week's annual paid holiday. The E.T.U., he said, could not associate with a National Joint Council in the engineering industry unless their members had a fair share of the fruits of higher productivity. They would not sign away the members' right to strike by agreeing to automatic arbitration on disputes.

The proposed impartial body to advise on wages, he said, was a deliberate attempt to take the question of pay as far from the workshop as possible. Mr. Foulkes hinted that the union would support strikes arising in disputes over the employment of non-unionists or over victimization, in spite of the conditions in the engineering wage agreement which imply that all such disputes should be referred to the industry's constitutional procedure. He was loudly applauded.

Both are rich men who have gratified their political ambitions in the Labour movement.

"It appears that we lesser mortals in the Labour movement have to fluctuate as between Socialist ideas and private enterprise in accordance with the enthusiasms of certain people to become Socialist Ministers or directors of big businesses.

"Mr. Stokes was once Minister of Works in a Labour Government and it should be clear to us next time we have a Labour Government that we have a person occupying that position who understands the building industry much better than Stokes. Mr. Stokes, with a typical business approach, applies efficiency as a test of principle rather than social justice. We reject such a principle and suggest that these gentlemen may well be in the right business but in the wrong party."

Delegates voted for the formation of a pension scheme within the building industry which, it was stated, was financially stable enough in view of the profits made in different sections.