

# HISTORY

OF THE

# CONGRESS.

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## THE 23 PREVIOUS MEETINGS.

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## A RECORD OF THE WORK DONE.

### 1ST CONGRESS—MANCHESTER—1868.

The first Congress was held at Manchester in the Whit Week of 1868, and Cottonopolis may, therefore, be considered as its birthplace. It is fair to say that this is disputed. A previous gathering had met at Sheffield previously, but it had reference more particularly to a scheme for effecting a fusion of trades on the basis of some form of federation—an attempt which, as all others have been, proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, there are Hallamites who insist that the Congress really first saw the light of day at their gloomy capital, but their argument rests on no very substantial foundation. The immediate causes which led to the holding of the first Congress were the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the working and rules of Trades Unions, and the decision of the Lord Chief Justice in the case of *Hornby v. Close*, which virtually declared that Trade Unions, being in restraint of trade, could not enforce agreements in a court of law, and that consequently their funds and property were absolutely without legal protection. The Unions themselves were at the time regarded with suspicion, and even with hatred. It was true they had been legalised so far back as 1824, but they had never become popular. As Mr. Howell puts it, they were assailed in Parliament, in the press, from the pulpit, and on the platform with a virulence seldom equalled, certainly never surpassed, in the history of public movements in this country. It was, then, in these circumstances that on June 2nd, 1868, the first Congress assembled in the Mechanics' Institute at Manchester. There were present thirty-four delegates from Manchester, London, Liverpool, Bradford, Birmingham, Bolton, Leeds, Nottingham, Preston, Sheffield, Salford, Dublin, and some other towns. They represented, according to the credentials handed in, about 118,367 members of Unions. The subjects discussed at this Congress included the absolute necessity of Trades Unions, foreign competition, political economy, the regulation of labour, the Factory Acts Extension Act, courts of conciliation and arbitration in trade disputes (a paper by Mr. Mundella), co-operation, the compulsory inspection of all places in which women and children are employed, the law of conspiracy as applied to labour, coercion, picketting, and intimidation, the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, legislation as regarded trade societies and their funds, and, lastly, the necessity for annual

trade Congresses. The subjects here enumerated indicated the preliminary character of the gathering, and show that the delegates were but feeling their way towards a more permanent form of organisation. The expenses of the Congress were provided by the payment of a fee of ten shillings by each delegate as his share of the cost.

### 2ND CONGRESS—BIRMINGHAM—1869.

The second Congress was held at Birmingham on August 23rd, 1869, and lasted till the 28th of the same month. The first Congress provided for the assembling of the second by electing Birmingham as the place where it should be held, and by relegating the duty of calling it to the Trades Council of that town. The meeting took place in the Oddfellows' Hall. Forty Associations were represented by 48 delegates, the members represented being 250,000, as stated in the credential forms. The chief topics of debate were the inquiry by and the reports of the Royal Commission, and the unprotected state of Trade Union funds. Papers were also read, and discussions took place upon piecework, overtime, limitation of apprentices, the protection of miners' lives, conciliation and arbitration, co-operation and industrial partnerships, national education, assisted emigration, the objects and uses of Trades Unions, strikes, and lockouts. It was at this Congress that the question was first mooted of labour representation in Parliament as a distinctive policy of the Unions; and the gathering was more political in its composition and complexion than the previous one, other parties than Trade Unions being represented at it without challenge. London was chosen as the place of meeting of the following Congress, and some five London delegates were elected as a committee to make the needful arrangements.

### 3RD CONGRESS—LONDON—1871.

But the third Congress was not called together in 1870, as had been intended—a circumstance which, as it happened, turned out to be rather fortunate, as it enabled the Congress when it did meet to deal with the Trade Union Bill introduced in the meantime by the Home Secretary. The gathering did not take place till March 6th, 1871, when the delegates met in the Portland Rooms, continuing their session until March 11th. Fifty delegates were present from 49 societies, representing 287,430 members. The chief subject of discussion was the bill above referred to, and the third clause of which re-enacted, with intensified force, the criminal provisions of previous statutes as interpreted by some of the judges. The entire section was strongly condemned, and the Government was urged by a large deputation to withdraw it. They so far yielded as to omit it from the bill, but it was brought in as a separate measure, and passed simultaneously with the Trade Union Act as the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1871. The other important subjects discussed at this Congress were the Mines Regulation Bill, the truck system, the weekly payment of wages, the Factory and Workshops Acts, and the employment of women and children in certain kinds of labour. Time was also found for the discussion of convict



labour, taxation, waste lands, emigration, and international fraternisation of labour. The chief feature was that the Congress manifested a distinct tendency towards Parliamentary action and legislative work. Merely academic papers were tolerated rather than encouraged, the general feeling being in favour of practical measures of immediate necessity as the one thing needful. Steps were taken to reduce the assembly to a system of order and regularity as to representation and the payment of expenses. A fee of 10s. was fixed as the amount to be paid by each delegate on the presentation of his credentials as his society's share of the expenses of the Congress. This rule has been operative ever since. A Parliamentary Committee, consisting of five members, including the chairman and secretary of the Congress, was elected to watch events and to take such action as might be deemed advisable during the Session of Parliament in regard to the matters discussed by and the decisions of the Congress. The gathering is noteworthy also for the appearance at it of Mr. Samuel Plimsoll, who then first explained his proposals for ensuring the safety of our seamen, and bespoke the aid of the delegates in the work he had undertaken.

#### 4TH CONGRESS—NOTTINGHAM—1872.

The fourth Congress was held at Nottingham on January 8th, 1872. It was decided to meet thus early in order to be ready with a programme of work for the ensuing session of Parliament. The number of Delegates present was 77, representing 63 Societies, and a total of 255,710 members, according to the credentials. Twelve of the Delegates were sent by political bodies, a system then for the first time authoritatively condemned, and since then never repeated—at least not with the sanction of the Congress. The Parliamentary Committee submitted its first Annual Report, giving an account of its action during the preceding year, a practice which has been followed at all successive Congresses. The discussions related mainly to the two Acts having reference to Trade Unions, and to the Bills to be introduced during the Session of 1872, namely, a Mines Regulation Bill, a Bill for the Regulation of Truck and ensuring the Weekly Payment of Wages, a Bill for Compensating the Families of Workmen for Losses sustained by Injuries inflicted while following their employment, and a Bill for Amending the Law Relating to Arbitration in Trade Disputes. The Committee were instructed to watch carefully the proposed legislation with respect to Friendly Societies, and to agitate for the appointment of an efficient Staff of Inspectors under the Factories and Workshops Acts. A good many other topics were disposed of, but it is to be observed that this time the Congress decided that papers in defence of Unionism were not necessary. The Parliamentary Committee was enlarged from five to ten members, and charged with the duty of preparing a code of standing orders for the government of future Congresses. It was also decided that the business of the Congress be relegated to a Standing Orders Committee of five, to be elected on the first day of each succeeding Congress, by whom the order of procedure of the questions to be discussed and all matters of detail should be arranged and

formulated. This was a more important step than at first sight may appear. There is always more work on the Agenda Paper than the Congress can possibly manage to get through, and a body which has the right to say in what order particular subjects may be discussed has *ipso facto* the right to veto any subjects which may be obnoxious to particular sections of the Delegates. By the appointment of the Standing Orders Committee, too, steps were taken for organising and establishing the Congress on a permanent basis as an institution, its constitution being then practically settled. But the Nottingham Congress became famous for other things than those already mentioned. Nottingham, Mr. Howell tells us, set the example which has since been followed in other towns, namely, the Mayor entertained the Delegates at a sumptuous banquet in the Town Hall, and the townspeople threw open their houses to the Delegates in a way which was most generous and surprising.

#### 5TH CONGRESS—LEEDS—1873.

The fifth Congress met at Leeds, on January 13th, 1873, the gathering taking place in the New Assembly Rooms. The report of the Parliamentary Committee was an elaborate one. It dealt with the various subjects mentioned in the Nottingham programme, but more especially with the Mines Regulation Act, and the Arbitration Act, both carried in 1872, and with the Factories Nine Hours Bill, the Truck System, Employers' Liability, and Prosecutions under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. The report concluded with a carefully-prepared synopsis of questions to be dealt with at the ensuing Session, formulated into a distinctive programme of work. This also has become a feature in each successive year's report. The discussions were for the most part confined to the matters mentioned in the report, various resolutions being passed with respect to them. The Standing Orders prepared by the Committee were submitted, and, with a few verbal alterations, adopted. These, with slight modifications, have governed the Congress since that time. Resolutions were also framed condemning the employment of soldiers in times of Labour Disputes, and severely criticising the sentences passed on the gas stokers. The Delegates present numbered 132, representing 140 Societies, and 730,074 members.

#### 6TH CONGRESS—SHEFFIELD—1874.

The next Congress, the sixth, was held at Sheffield on January 12th, 1874. There were present in the Temperance Hall when the meeting took place 169 Delegates, representing 153 Societies, and 1,191,922 members. The Parliamentary Committee's report was a long document, dealing with some dozen questions. These included the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1871, the Masters and Servants Act, 1867, the conspiracy law, the Trades Unions Act, 1871, the jury laws, compensation for injuries, payment of wages, the summary jurisdiction of magistrates, federation of employers, &c. Some discussion also took place on the question of federating Trades Unions, on merchant seamen, hours of labour, and the grievances of postal employees. In consequence of the number of



members represented having been duplicated in the credentials, a committee was ordered to report thereon at the next Congress.

#### 7TH CONGRESS—LIVERPOOL—1875.

This, the seventh, took place at Liverpool on January 18th, 1875, the meeting being held in the Concert Hall, Lord Nelson Street. There were present 151 delegates, representing 107 societies, and 818,032 members. The report was again an elaborate one, dealing with some eighteen questions, but for the most part it traversed the same ground as before. The interest of the gathering mainly centred on those portions of the report which dealt with the conclusions of the Royal Commission on the Labour Laws appointed by the Government on coming into office in 1874. The Congress rejected a scheme of federation which had been prepared by the committee, and it referred back a proposed new constitution for the Congress. Neither of these schemes has ever secured the sanction of the Congress, although both were discussed on subsequent occasions.

#### 8TH CONGRESS—GLASGOW—1876.

Glasgow was the town selected for the meeting of the eighth Congress, and there it assembled on October 11th, 1875. The change of date was the result of a resolution carried at a previous Congress. The report dealt with some 20 different subjects, but the chief topic was the Workmen's victory gained by the passage of the Labour Laws in the Session of the current year. It was the celebration of a great triumph after years of hard work, but it was also the starting point of a new departure, covering a wider field, social and political. The Labour Laws having been passed, Mr. Howell, the Secretary resigned on account of ill-health and need of rest, Mr. Henry Broadhurst, M.P., being elected in his stead. No new subjects of moment were added to the programme. The Delegates present numbered 139, and these represented 109 Societies, and 539,823 members.

#### 9TH CONGRESS—NEWCASTLE—1876.

For the place of its ninth meeting the Congress selected Newcastle, and there the members met on September 18th, 1876, the session lasting until the 23rd. There were present 140 delegates, representing 113 societies and 556,488 members. The sessions were held in the Mechanics' Institute. The report of the Parliamentary Committee dealt with twelve different subjects, the chief one being the Trade Unions Act 1871 Amendment Act, 1876, which had embodied every improvement suggested by successive Congresses since 1871. The other special subjects dealt with were the extension of the provisions as to breaches of contract in the Employers and Workmen Act of 1875 to seamen while in British waters, the Lord Chancellor's rules for carrying out the before-mentioned Act, the report of the Royal Commission on the Factories and Workshops Act, and Co-operation. A valuable paper on the Codification of the Law was presented from the pen of Mr. Henry Crompton. This subject, by a special resolution of the Congress, was added to the Committee's Programme.

#### 10TH CONGRESS—LEICESTER—1877.

The next Congress, the tenth, took place at Leicester, where the gathering was held on September 17th, 1877. There were 141 delegates, representing 112 societies and 691,089 members. The new questions introduced into the committee's report had reference to the Justices' Clerks' Act, 1877, the proposals for a Criminal Code Bill, the abolition of imprisonment for debt, Danish trade unions, and thrift. Sir Thomas (now Lord) Brassey gave an address on work and wages in 1877, and on labour at home and abroad. This paper gave a tone to the Congress, and influenced the discussions during the week.

#### 11TH CONGRESS—BRISTOL—1878.

The eleventh Congress was held at Bristol, the members assembling on September 9th, 1878, in the Athenæum. The report of the committee dealt with some sixteen subjects, the most prominent being the Employers' Liability Bill, the Factories and Workshops Consolidation Act, and the Merchant Seamen Bill. The programme for the next year was reduced to nine subjects, no new topic being introduced. The notable event of this Congress was Mr. John Morley's paper on over-production, an address much commented upon at the time. There were present 136 delegates, from 114 societies, and they represented 623,957 members.

#### 12TH CONGRESS—EDINBURGH—1879.

Next year, the twelfth Congress was held in Edinburgh, there being 115 delegates present from 92 societies, and representing 541,892 members. Nineteen subjects were touched upon in the report, the most important being the Employers' Liability Bill and the Criminal Code Bill, then before Parliament, and the Summary Jurisdiction Act, 1879. Three new questions were added to the programme, namely, reform of the land laws, assimilation of the borough and county franchise, and the extension of the hours of polling.

#### 13TH CONGRESS—DUBLIN—1880.

The thirteenth Congress was held at Dublin on September 16th, 1880, and was attended by 120 delegates, sent by 105 societies, and representing 494,222 members. The gathering took place in the Antient Concert Rooms. The report dealt with twelve subjects, the chief being the Employers' Liability Act of 1880. The Act for regulating the carriage of grain cargoes in bulk, and the Act extending the provisions of the Employers and Workmen's Act to British seamen. The only new subject introduced was the Irish land laws.

#### 14TH CONGRESS—LONDON—1881.

For its fourteenth meeting the Congress reverted to London. There, in St. Andrew's Hall, Newman Street, on September 12th, 1881, 157 delegates, from 122 societies, and representing 463,899 members, assembled for the despatch of business. The report discussed eighteen different subjects, some of which was outside their province of legislation. The committee referred with pride to the fact that one of their number had been appointed an inspector of factories under the new Act, and they intimated that this was but the thin end of the wedge—a prediction subsequently fulfilled. Some noisy



debates took place on the subject of fair trade, mainly at the instigation of certain persons who had managed to get into the Congress as delegates. Eventually, they were expelled.

#### 15TH CONGRESS—MANCHESTER—1882.

The fifteenth Congress was held at Manchester. It was attended by 153 delegates, sent by 126 societies, and representing 509,337 members. The representatives assembled on September 18th, 1882, in the Co-operative Hall. The report dealt mainly with the Employers' Liability Act, 1880, Amendment Bill, the codification of the criminal law, the Payment of Wages in Public-houses Prevention Bill, the inspection of factories and workshops, reform of the cab laws, land law reform, the Settled Estates Act, registrars' charges for certificates of death, and co-operation. The other questions discussed comprised the poor law system, the Public Health Act, the regulation of bake-houses, and infant mortality.

#### 16TH CONGRESS—NOTTINGHAM—1883.

Next year's meeting was at Nottingham, where the sixteenth Congress was attended by 163 delegates, representing the same number of societies, and 471,651 members. Only one new subject was dealt with in the report of the Parliamentary Committee. The most important subject for consideration was one of industrial organisation—the projected labour conference in Paris.

#### 17TH CONGRESS—ABERDEEN—1884.

The seventeenth Congress took place at Aberdeen on September 8th, 1884. Savings banks, hours of labour, and international trades unionism were among the new subjects discussed. Lord Rosebery and Lord Aberdeen were present, the former delivering an address. The increasing tendency to political action, which had been growing from year to year, was again manifested at this Congress. There were present 142 delegates, representing 129 societies, and 598,033 members.

#### 18TH CONGRESS—SOUTHPORT—1885.

Lancashire was next visited by the Congress, the eighteenth meeting being held at Southport on September 7th, 1885. The report dealt with some 14 subjects, two of which were new, namely, Government contracts and colonial questions. The most important matter which engaged the attention of this Congress was the issue of a manifesto, in view of the approaching general election, containing questions to be supported or voted for by candidates. 141 delegates were present. They represented 136 societies and 580,976 members.

#### 19TH CONGRESS—HULL—1886.

At Hull, where the nineteenth Congress met, 143 delegates from 121 societies, and representing 633,088 members, were present. The Session commenced on 6th September, 1886. The most important features were that free education was added to the programme, and that a committee was appointed to consider the best means of securing increased labour representation in Parliament.

#### 20TH CONGRESS—SWANSEA—1887.

The twentieth Congress was held at Swansea on September 5th, 1887. It was attended by

156 delegates, who had been sent by 131 societies, and who represented 674,034 members. The report of the Parliamentary Committee dealt with fourteen different subjects, of which the right of public meeting in Ireland, trade marks, sanitary inspection, and the revision of the statute law were new ones.

#### 21ST CONGRESS—BRADFORD—1888.

The next Congress, the twenty-first, was held at Bradford on September 3rd, 1888. There were present 156 delegates from 131 societies, and representing 674,634 members. This Congress was interesting on account of a discussion on the proposed eight hours day.

#### 22ND CONGRESS—DUNDEE—1889.

The following year the Congress, the twenty-second, assembled at Dundee. It met on September 2nd in the Gilfillan Hall, and was attended by 211 delegates, representing 171 societies and 885,055 members. Interest centred chiefly in the debate on the eight hours question, which again came up for consideration, and in an attack on Mr. Broadhurst by the "new" unionists. The proceedings are too recent to call for prolonged notice here. Suffice it to say that the Congress, after a bitter and personal discussion, on the motion of Mr. John Wilson, M.P., who was Chairman of the Standing Orders Committee, passed a vote of confidence in Mr. Broadhurst by 177 votes to 11. A resolution was moved "That this Congress instructs the Parliamentary Committee to take action on the following resolution: 'That the maximum working day for all trades be eight hours.'" A direct negative to this resolution was moved, as was also an amendment. In the division which took place upon this question, 88 voted for the direct negative, and 63 for the motion. A vote was next taken on the amendment, which instructed the Parliamentary Committee to collect full information on the hours of labour of all classes of workers in this country, and of corresponding workers in America, the colonies, and the Continent of Europe. There voted for the amendment 34, and for the previous question 87. The Congress subsequently adopted resolutions in favour of amending the Employers' Liability Act, the law as to coroners' inquests in Scotland, Labour Representation in Parliament, and other subjects mentioned in the report of the Parliamentary Committee.

#### 23RD CONGRESS—LIVERPOOL—1890.

The twenty-third Congress—that of last year was held at Liverpool. It met on September 1st, and was attended by no fewer than 457 delegates, representing 311 societies and 1,470,191 members. The Parliamentary Committee's report dealt with the Load Line Bill, an Eight Hours Bill for miners, the federation of trades, income-tax on trade union investments, and the Berlin Labour Conference. But the eight hours day was once more the question of questions. A resolution in favour of an eight hours day by Act of Parliament was moved, and carried by a majority of 32, there voting 193 for the resolution and 155 against. Mr. Broadhurst resigned the secretaryship of the Parliamentary Committee, and was replaced by Mr. Charles Fenwick.