

MR. GEORGE POTTER,
CONDUCTOR OF THE "BEE-HIVE" NEWSPAPER.

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GEORGE POTTER, THE JUNTA, AND THE BEE-HIVE

Most histories of the nineteenth-century labour movement give some account of George Potter's conflict with the men the Webbs called the Junta; and it is generally recognised that one main bone of contention was control of the *Bee-Hive* newspaper. But there has been little real analysis of this quarrel, and even less of the eventual reconciliation. It is true that some of the old generalisations are no longer accepted. Nowadays, most labour historians agree that the Webbs, writing under Applegarth's influence, dismissed Potter too contemptuously. There is also some recognition of the fact that Raymond Postgate's *Builders' History*, although more accurate on Potter's early position in the labour movement, gives a completely false impression of his later career and the changes that took place in the *Bee-Hive*. But through it all, Potter has remained a rather shadowy figure, and in published works the *Bee-Hive's* own history has been surprisingly neglected.¹ Even a recent work in which the author avowedly sets out to correct the record on Potter – B. C. Roberts's *The Trades Union Congress, 1868-1921* – is in many ways unsatisfactory. Roberts does make an attempt to analyse the conflict, and on the whole he sums up Potter's aims and achievements more accurately than either the Webbs or Postgate did. But in trying to give Potter due credit for his part in founding the TUC, Roberts has over-estimated his contribution, and minimised his weaknesses. Above all, he has paid too little attention to the *Bee-Hive* itself. As a result, the consequences of the way in which the paper was founded and conducted, and the relationship between Potter's other activities and the *Bee-Hive's* successive changes of ownership, editorship and policy, are either disre-

¹ Much of the material in this article has been taken from my unpublished D.Phil. thesis, *George Potter and the Bee-Hive Newspaper* (Oxford, 1956). I have described the founding of the *Bee-Hive* in "The *Bee-Hive* Newspaper: its Origin and Early Struggles", in: *Essays in Labour History*, ed. A. Briggs and J. Saville, 1960.

garded or mistakenly interpreted. Potter's career in the labour movement, and the development of the *Bee-Hive*, were completely interwoven, and neither can be fully assessed without the other.

I

Fundamental to the quarrel with the Junta was the fact that Potter was widely known as a trade union leader, and had already established the *Bee-Hive*, before the Junta had made any collective impact on the labour movement. Potter's reputation dated from the strike and lock-out in the London building trades in 1859-60. In 1858, aged 26, and holding office as chairman of the Progressive Society of Carpenters and Joiners, Potter had revived the nine-hours movement – first among carpenters and then as secretary to the Building Trades Conference. During the dispute that followed, Potter played his part admirably as organiser and as chief spokesman for the Conference; and by the time the employers' Document was withdrawn, he had achieved a national reputation. There can be no doubt that this turned his head, and gave him an exaggerated belief in his own capacities as a leader. He was no policy-maker – the policies of the Building Trades Conference were largely dictated by circumstances – and his weaknesses were revealed during the next few months. This was the period when the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, the Operative Bricklayers' Society, and the London Trades Council were being formed, and the most responsible members of the builders' unions were preoccupied with the need for a sounder basis of organisation. Potter stayed with the Progressive Carpenters instead of helping to build the ASCJ, made no attempt to obtain a seat on the Trades Council, and alienated some of his previous supporters by trying once more to revive the nine-hours movement. The employers' introduction of payment by the hour, in 1861, was to a large extent provoked by Potter's renewed activities. Resistance to the new system came mainly from the stonemasons and the bricklayers, and in this dispute Potter played only a minor part. But the attitude of the press finally convinced him that he must launch a national trade union newspaper.

The *Bee-Hive* first appeared, as a twopenny weekly, on 19 October 1861. Potter had no intention of editing the paper himself; for this, he had brought in two men with far better qualifications than his own.¹ The first editor was George Troup, a Scotsman with some twenty-five years' editorial experience, who had been free-lancing in London

¹ Roberts follows the Webbs in regarding Potter as the editor from the beginning, and bases several of his comments on this assumption (*The Trades Union Congress, 1868-1921*, 1958, pp. 20, 26 and 63).

since the failure of *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*. His sub-editor was Robert Hartwell, a compositor by trade and also a part-time reporter, whose record of activity in the labour movement stretched back through Chartism to the agitations of the early 1830's. Potter's chosen position was that of manager to the Trades Newspaper Co. – the limited liability company he had formed to finance the *Bee-Hive*. The earliest unions to take up the five-shilling shares – usually in batches of 20 or less – all represented branches of the building trades, while most of the individual shareholders at that stage were carpenters or painters.¹ But the paper could not have been started without a loan of £ 120 from William Dell, another old Radical who was later to become treasurer to the General Council of the International and joint treasurer to the Reform League. This loan almost certainly provided more than half the capital with which the *Bee-Hive* was launched; and this gave weight to Dell's subsequent complaint that “Mr. Potter deceived me at the outset”, since the loan was made on condition that Potter should consult the London Trades Council and “leading representative men”.² Potter, in order to ensure that control at the start was in his own hands, avoided all such consultation, and founded the company with seven of his friends as the first Board of Directors. As a result, the Trades Council decided, before the first issue appeared, that it was “inadvisable to assist any private speculation of this kind”.³

Nevertheless, the *Bee-Hive*, helped by expert journalism and Potter's vigorous salesmanship, made a very promising start. Its combination of political comment, “trades intelligence”, and general news was widely welcomed; and when a deputation from the Directors told the Trades Council in November that the circulation had already reached 5,000, the paper was adopted as the organ of the Trades Council.⁴ But Potter's high-handed methods were not forgotten, and the *Bee-Hive* soon ran into difficulties. The earliest problems were financial – too little share capital was being subscribed, the early circulation could not be maintained, and over the first year the company accumulated debts amounting to £ 827. These problems soon merged with disputes over policy, since Troup, apparently with Potter's unquestioning agreement, was determined to use the *Bee-Hive*

¹ Three lists of shareholders – dated 1863, 1864, and 1866 – together with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, are in the company's file (now in the Public Record Office).

² *Bee-Hive*, 15 April 1865.

³ LTC Minutes, 21 August 1861. The arrangements for financing and editing the paper are described in more detail in “The *Bee-Hive* Newspaper: its Origin and Early Struggles”.

⁴ LTC Minutes, 19 November 1861.

in support of the South in the American Civil War.¹ At the first annual general meeting of shareholders, a stronger and more independent Board of Directors was elected. A reforming party among these Directors, led by William Dell and George Odger, first raised enough money in long-term loans to satisfy the most pressing creditors, and then, in January 1863, insisted on Troup's resignation and the reversal of the *Bee-Hive's* American policy. But when they followed this up with an attempt to dismiss Potter, as a man unfit to be manager, they were defeated by a special meeting of shareholders. At the next annual general meeting, in November 1863, the whole Board resigned, to be replaced by new Directors who, like the majority of the shareholders, had no wish to oppose Potter.²

1864 was a year of improving fortunes for the *Bee-Hive*. Hartwell had become editor, and soon settled down to an effective working partnership with Potter. The circulation and the income from advertisements were both rising, and although Potter had to report to the annual general meeting that liabilities had slightly increased, most of the shareholders were satisfied that this was necessary in order to improve the news coverage.³ The Northern cause was now firmly supported,⁴ while Hartwell's internationalism was demonstrated by the amount of space he devoted to the Polish liberation movement and to Garibaldi's visit. Later in the year the growing Reform movement, in which Hartwell was actively engaged, formed one of his main themes. Meanwhile, in its columns of "trades intelligence", the *Bee-Hive* was steadily becoming more representative of the trade union movement over the country as a whole. 1864 was a year of increasing industrial unrest, and disputes involving the South Staffordshire miners, the Midlands building operatives, and the Leeds ironworkers, were reported and commented upon in great detail.

It was in these circumstances that the importance of the London Trades Council's position became manifest. At one meeting after another, representatives of unions on strike or locked out were interrogated on their case, before the Council decided whether to grant

¹ For an account of Troup's views, and those of other "Southerners" in the labour movement, see Royden Harrison, "British Labour and the Confederacy", in: *International Review of Social History*, Vol. II (1957), Part 1.

² *Bee-Hive*, 1 November 1862, 22 August and 7 November 1863, and 10 and 24 June 1865; *Miner and Workman's Advocate*, 15 July 1865; *Workman's Advocate*, 9 September 1865.

³ *Bee-Hive*, 19 November 1864.

⁴ There was one sign of wavering. In February 1864, the new Directors allowed Potter to bring Troup back as a contributor, and in one article Troup again criticised the North. The result was an extended controversy with E. S. Beesly, who also prodded the Directors into a reaffirmation of the *Bee-Hive's* pro-Northern policy (*Bee-Hive*, 20 February to 2 April 1864).

them credentials with which they could appeal for the support of London unions. From the same Trades Council reports, it is possible to trace the beginnings of concerted action among the group of men who have come to be known as the Junta. Four of this group were general secretaries – William Allan of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Robert Applegarth of the ASCJ, Edwin Coulson of the Operative Bricklayers, and Daniel Guile of the Ironfounders.¹ These men were drawn together by a common interest, since their unions, in spite of minor differences, were fundamentally of the same type, based on the “amalgamated principles” first laid down by the ASE; and they found themselves pursuing a common policy, for which eventually they worked together quite deliberately as a team. The fifth member of the group, George Odger, was very differently placed. He held no office either in his local union, the West End Ladies’ Shoemakers’ Society, or in the Amalgamated Cordwainers’ Society, which he had helped to found at the beginning of 1863; while the Amalgamated Cordwainers had adopted a much looser form of organisation than that of the true amalgamated societies, being in fact more like some of the old-fashioned federations. However, Odger had become secretary to the Trades Council in July 1862, and on general policy his views were very similar to those of the other four. Their aims, broadly speaking, were stability of organisation, discipline within unions, and, above all, full recognition of the unions by employers, by the public, and by the law. It naturally followed that they preferred negotiation or arbitration (which involved some measure of recognition) to the old wasteful methods of frequent strike action.

But such generalisations always carry with them the danger of imposing too tidy a pattern upon past events. Since the Webbs described the work of the Junta, there has often been a tendency to over-emphasise the harmony of their views, and to pre-date their formation into what the Webbs called “a compact group”.² Applegarth and Odger were much more concerned with political questions than were the other three; Coulson, in spite of his belief in “amalgamated principles”, often showed himself to be temperamentally more akin to the rough-and-ready trade union leaders of an earlier generation; while Daniel Guile, the one most recently elected to office, did not work closely with the others until 1867. It was in fact in that year,

¹ Allan and Coulson had held this office since the formation of their unions, in 1851 and 1860. Applegarth had become the second general secretary of the ASCJ in 1862, and Guile had been elected when the Friendly Society of Ironfounders, an old-established union, was reorganised in 1863.

² *History of Trade Unionism*, 1920 edn., p. 239.

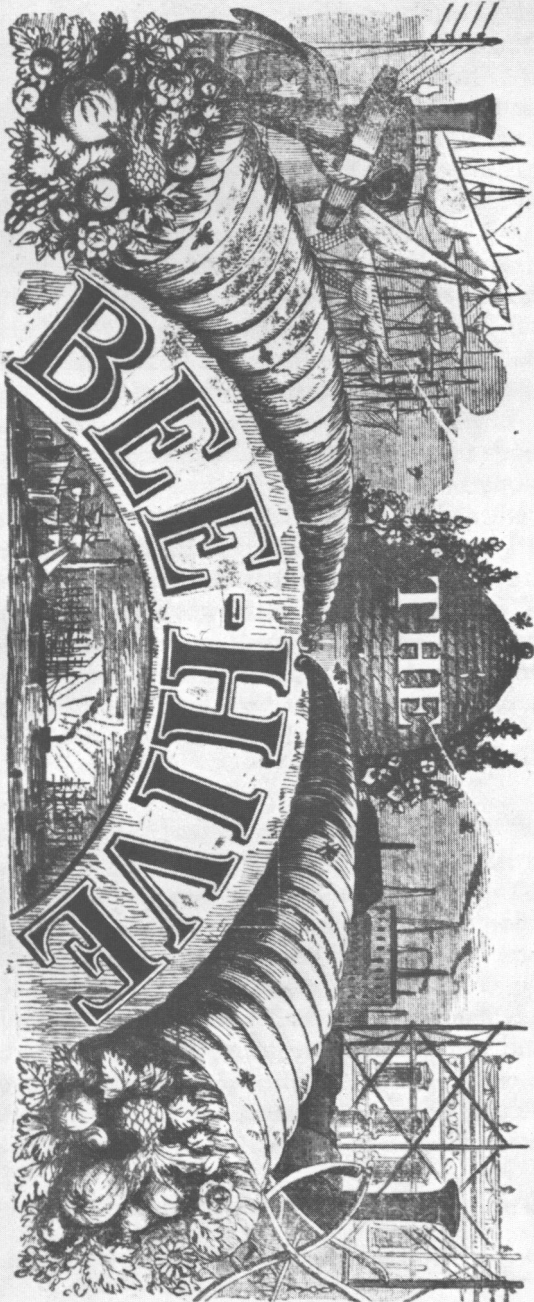
with the establishment of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, that the real team-work of the Junta began.¹ Nevertheless, by 1864 this future partnership was already being foreshadowed. The four general secretaries, whose influence was increasing as their unions grew stronger, either sat on the Trades Council themselves, or were represented there by leading members of their unions, while Odger as secretary to the Council was of course in a key position. In the disputes of 1864, the policy of the Trades Council usually approximated to that which we now associate with the Junta. This policy was expressed in its crudest form by Robert Danter, president of the ASE, when he told the representatives of the South Staffordshire miners that if their members' behaviour had been in any way provocative, or even if their brass bands were making themselves a public nuisance, they must expect no help from the London unions.² However, the miners were able to reassure Danter, and they received their credentials. Since this was what normally happened in 1864, it only gradually emerged that the *Bee-Hive's* policy was less discriminating, being based on the principle of support for any group of workers involved in a dispute with their employers, whatever the circumstances.

Meanwhile, the internationalism of the London working men had reached its logical climax in the founding of the International Working Men's Association – the First International – at the meeting in St. Martin's Hall on 28 September. Odger became the first president, and Applegarth joined in the following January. From the beginning, the *Bee-Hive* too was closely associated with the International.³ Although Potter never became a member, Hartwell joined at the start, and was one of the first group of members elected to the General Council. On 22 November, the *Bee-Hive* was adopted as the organ of the Association. On the face of it, this was another recognition of the *Bee-Hive's* value as the "advocate of industrial interests", and a recommendation of the paper similar to that approved by the Trades Council in 1861. But from Karl Marx's correspondence, it appears that something more than this was behind the resolution. Although

¹ Even then, there were disagreements between them that were never made public. On a draft of the Junta's Trade Union Bill (now in the Howell Collection, Bishopsgate Institute) George Howell scribbled notes of a violent argument between Applegarth and Odger. Odger, more sensitive to the views of the smaller societies, wanted the campaign to revert to the Trades Council; but he was over-ruled by Applegarth.

² *Bee-Hive*, 29 October 1864.

³ The inaugural meeting was advertised and fully reported in the *Bee-Hive*, while the "Address and Provisional Rules" were published in pamphlet form from the *Bee-Hive* office.



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he had appeared only as “a mute figure on the platform”¹ at the inaugural meeting, Marx held very decided views on the direction in which he intended to guide the International; and he hoped to make the *Bee-Hive* its organ in a very literal sense, even to the extent of controlling the paper’s policy. This necessarily involved an attempt to displace Potter. Recognising that it was men of the type of Applegarth and Odger who represented the real strength of the trade union movement in this country, Marx was bent on securing their co-operation, in spite of the fact that their views made it necessary to tone down for a while “the old boldness of speech”.² But for Potter, he had nothing but contempt. On 2 December Marx wrote to Engels describing a scheme worked out in the small sub-committee, which he already dominated – “that a share fund be established by us enabling us to create shareholders and to swamp the old majority”.³ That leading members of the International proceeded to take out shares in the Trades Newspaper Co. is shown by the next list of shareholders. But Marx had started too late, having apparently mistaken the date of the annual general meeting. Although he was writing to Engels again about the scheme a few days before the half-yearly meeting in the following May, that meeting showed the “old majority” as firmly entrenched as ever. By then, relations between the *Bee-Hive* and the International had become inextricably entangled with the growing conflict between Potter and the Junta.

II

1865 was in many ways the peak year of the *Bee-Hive*; and it was the conflict with the Junta that first raised the paper to its highest point of success, and then was largely responsible for its decline. To say that this was a struggle between the supporters of the new policy of “amalgamated principles” and moderation, led by the Junta, and the old-fashioned militants, led by Potter, is no doubt as valid as such a generalisation can be. Yet it is difficult to find any fundamental clash of philosophies. Potter was not a Socialist, or anything like one; in fact, his political views were less consistently radical than were those of Odger or Applegarth. In spite of appearances, he had no philosophy of class-struggle to set against their preference for more conciliatory methods.

Two main policies were constantly advocated in the early *Bee-Hives*

¹ Marx to Engels, 4 November 1864 (MEGA III [Correspondence Marx-Engels], Vol. III, p. 196).

² Marx to Engels, 4 November 1864.

³ Marx to Engels, 2 December 1864 (MEGA, Vol. III, p. 210).

– political action on the part of trade unionists, and support for what were usually called “advance movements” or “forward policies” in industrial relations. The latter of course represented Potter’s point of view, while with the former, though it was primarily Hartwell’s concern, Potter had allowed himself to become identified. There is little in this to account for the bitterness of the clash. Applegarth and Odger were among the men mainly responsible for turning the attention of trade unionists towards politics; and the Junta were certainly not opposed in all circumstances to industrial militancy. It is true that they wished to reduce strike action to a minimum, and that this was a most important item in their programme. But they never suggested that the reserve weapon of the strike should be discarded. The same Trades Council report which censured Potter for his activities in support of strikes also included praise for the London Brickmakers, whose “strike of the most justifiable character” had been “a great success”.¹ Applegarth, questioned about strikes before the Royal Commission, impressed the Commissioners and public opinion with his evidence that one-third of the applications from branches for permission to strike had been refused by his Executive.² The fact remains that two-thirds had received official sanction.

Many statements could be quoted from either side to show the similarity between Potter’s views and the Junta’s. Potter frequently declared himself in favour of arbitration as a method of settling disputes, and he was several times reported to have said, in words which also occurred in *Bee-Hive* editorials: “Strikes are always evil – though in most cases a necessary evil.”³ Against this may be set a statement by Applegarth, who was prepared to tell a branch of his union that “The interests of masters and men were not in fact identical, nor ever could be so, but were opposed; nevertheless, no-one felt more strongly than himself the necessity of a good understanding between them”.⁴ From their respective policies, the first part of each statement might well be taken as representing the other man’s point

¹ Fifth Annual Report (published by mistake as Sixth Annual Report), August 1865 (Howell Collection).

² Qu. 136.

³ E.g., *Bee-Hive*, 18 October 1862; 18 February 1865; 17 March 1866.

⁴ Speech to the Bradford branch of the ASCJ (*Bee-Hive*, 22 July 1865). Cf. Allan’s evidence before the Royal Commission: “Every day of the week I hear that the interests (of employers and employed) are identical. I scarcely see how they can be while we are in a state of society which recognises the principle of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market. It is in their interest to get the labour done at as low a rate as possible and it is ours to get as high rate of wages as possible, and you can never reconcile these two things”. (Qu. 924).

of view. The real difference of attitude comes out in the emphasis given in each case to the second part of the statement.

Whatever his faults, Potter was certainly not “a manufacturer of strikes”. But it could be argued that expectations of support might lead to a greater readiness to resort to strike action; and it was on these grounds that Applegarth criticised him in his more guarded official utterances: “Mr. Potter, if he does not openly advocate them, invariably pursues a policy that must inevitably lead to strikes.”¹ This policy of Potter’s was based quite simply on the view that once a strike had broken out, the men involved should be given immediate and whole-hearted support. Where the Trades Council examined each case in cold blood before deciding whether that particular strike deserved to be supported, Potter argued that the men on the spot were the ones who knew best the rights and wrongs of their own case. This was clearly at variance with the Junta’s policy. At a time when strikes were normally local affairs, the members of their own unions had to be taught not to strike without having first obtained sanction from headquarters; and in the Trades Council, they were building up a central organisation which would have at least a restraining effect on would-be strikers in other unions. The fierceness of their denunciations of Potter as “a strike-monger” and “a manufacturer of strikes” was a reflection of the extent to which he hampered them.

Two further comments by Applegarth, made at different times during the quarrel, show how he regarded Potter as an obstacle to the achievement of his most cherished aims. One was: “The columns of the *Bee-Hive* are filled with matter which tends to set masters against men.”² The other, in which Applegarth touched on one of the main reasons for the Junta’s attitude, was: “While such delusion lasts as to Mr. Potter’s power and influence, the suffrage will never be extended to our order.”³ Much of the Junta’s antagonism was in fact the result of Potter’s widespread reputation as a trade union leader. He was a man with no official position in the trade union movement, belonging to a small local society with a fluctuating membership of little more than 100; yet he aspired to the leadership of the London building trades, used his position as manager of the *Bee-Hive* to influence members of other trades, and had so established himself in the public eye that even Gladstone thought he was “the secretary of the trade unions”.⁴ Potter had undeniably been the leader in the struggle of 1859-60, and he had led the building operatives with

¹ ASCJ Monthly Report, May 1865.

² *Bee-Hive*, 9 March 1867.

³ ASCJ Monthly Report, May 1865.

⁴ Hansard, 7 March 1864.

determination and with some success. But at that time he had been the duly elected secretary of a central organisation for the London building trades. The situation had changed since then, with the ending of the Building Trades Conference, the growth of the Operative Bricklayers' Society and the ASCJ, and above all the establishment of the London Trades Council as a permanent and responsible organ of leadership at something approaching a national level. On the Trades Council, Potter figured only as one of the fifteen members, and even his membership dated only from 1863. Yet his opinions and actions were still widely regarded by the general public as those of the acknowledged leader of the trade union movement.

To full-time officials such as Applegarth, trying to build up stable organisations by methods which would gain the respect of the middle class, Potter was a man in an essentially irresponsible position, threatening to undo their work. Their preference was all in favour of small committees, properly appointed delegates, and a form of organisation that enabled them to hold back their members from precipitate action. Potter's methods were the old-fashioned ones of public denunciation and rowdy meetings, almost unrelated to permanent organisation; and his powers as an orator, combined with his popularity among the rank and file of London trade unionists, ensured for his meetings at least the appearance of success. Besides providing him with a more effective mouthpiece than anything at the Junta's disposal, the *Bee-Hive* gave him a further advantage, since their methods inevitably took time, while Potter could – and once the struggle had developed, continually did – step in ahead of them and call meetings by notice in the paper. The Junta appreciated the value of publicity, at a time when trade unions were so often regarded as rather sinister secret societies, and they would have preferred to control the *Bee-Hive* while diminishing Potter's standing as a working-class leader. But if the paper could not be controlled, then it must at all costs be destroyed, along with Potter's reputation.

This attitude towards Potter and the *Bee-Hive* had been hardening for some time before the explosion came in 1865. When Potter founded the *Bee-Hive* without consultation, the Junta had not yet come together, and Applegarth himself was still in Sheffield. But Potter had shown then that he intended the new paper to be very much under his own control. The difficulty of lessening this control while Potter retained his popularity among so many of the shareholders had been demonstrated during the *Bee-Hive's* second year, when Odger and Dell had led the anti-Potter section of the Directors. The issues at stake then were not so much questions of support for strikes, but rather Potter's claims to leadership, and the divergence of views over

the American Civil War. In addition, Potter's rather questionable managerial methods had already given offence. When Odger declared that there were no invoices or receipts for the money expended on printing during the first two years, Potter was able to reply convincingly that in this matter he had followed the normal trade practice.¹ Nevertheless, his book-keeping, criticised by the auditors (at least by implication) in 1864, and a continual refusal to provide balance sheets for the shareholders, showed at best a somewhat casual attitude towards the company's finances.² While this was quite in keeping with the practice of many of the old-fashioned unions, it was very different from the scrupulously correct business methods of the amalgamated societies; and it left Potter open to charges of corruption which may not have been justified. His methods of securing the vitally necessary advertisements were also criticised. There were "puffs" for companies which promptly went bankrupt, special rates for a firm described by Applegarth as "slop tailors", even a series of reports of the activities of a "Commons Club" which did not in fact exist, the reports being really a medium of advertisement for the firms mentioned in them.³ These were not, perhaps, very serious lapses, in view of the need to establish the *Bee-Hive* as an advertising medium. But like his casual accountancy, they did provide ammunition for Potter's critics.

Following closely upon the resignation of the *Bee-Hive* Directors, the early months of 1864 had seen attempts to diminish Potter's standing in the wider movement. In March there was an attempt, led by Odger and W. R. Cremer,⁴ to remove him from the treasurership to the Working Men's Garibaldi Committee.⁵ In March, too, Potter was opposing Gladstone's Government Annuities Bill at public meetings, and a deputation from the Trades Council, composed of Odger, Coulson and Applegarth, explained to the Chancellor that Potter was not a recognised spokesman for the trade union movement.⁶ The first real brush with Applegarth on industrial policy came in May, when Applegarth's efforts to persuade the locked-out Birmingham building operatives and their employers to accept arbitration received no support from the *Bee-Hive*, and his speeches were reported in a muti-

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 24 June 1865.

² *Bee-Hive*, 4 June and 19 November 1864, and 27 May and 3 June 1865.

³ See, in particular, *Bee-Hive*, 31 October 1863 and 24 June 1865; and ASCJ Monthly Report, May 1865.

⁴ Cremer – the first secretary to the International, and eventually Sir Randall Cremer, the "first working man knight" – had been a member of the Progressive Carpenters, and supported Potter during the nine-hours movement. By the end of 1861 he had moved over into the ASCJ.

⁵ *Bee-Hive*, 2 and 9 April 1864.

⁶ *Bee-Hive*, 5 March to 2 April 1864.

lated form. An outspoken editorial by Hartwell quoted Applegarth as saying that the *Bee-Hive* “had ceased to be the faithful organ of the trade unions”, and that “he would do all he could to crush it”; to which Applegarth replied with a brief but pointed comment on the irresponsibility of “founding a leading article on a hearsay fabrication”.¹ A similar situation arose in the following December and January, when the Birmingham carpenters struck against the master builders’ introduction of a Discharge Note. The Executive of the ASCJ decided to support their members, but rebuked them for striking “without acquainting us with their intentions” and “without first trying other means to accomplish their object”. Potter declared that “not to have struck would have been a crime”. Vigorously supported by Hartwell in the *Bee-Hive*, Potter called delegate meetings of the London carpenters, raised subscriptions for the strikers, and applauded their action when against Applegarth’s advice they demanded official confirmation of the Discharge Note’s withdrawal before returning to work.² With Applegarth’s antagonism thoroughly aroused, the somewhat spasmodic opposition which Potter had previously faced took on a new and more sustained character; and the stage was set for the full-scale trial of strength that followed.

III

At the beginning of 1865, Potter’s position appeared a very favourable one. The *Bee-Hive* was already the official organ of the London Trades Council and of the International, and in January the National Association of Mineworkers also decided to recognise it as their organ;³ but while this did imply mutual support, none of these bodies had any share in control over the paper’s policy. When Applegarth, disregarding the implications of his words, went so far as to say to the Birmingham carpenters: “If I had been in Birmingham I should have been at my bench on Monday morning”, the *Bee-Hive*’s criticism received widespread approval, even from members of Applegarth’s own union. In spite of the fact that Potter was voted a gratuity of £ 8 by his Discharge Note Committee, giving Applegarth the opportunity – which he used to the full – of asserting that Potter was making money while prolonging the strike, Potter’s activities at this time clearly increased rather than diminished his general popularity. Support for

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 4 and 11 June 1864.

² For the Discharge Note struggle, see *Bee-Hive*, 17 December 1864 to 18 February 1865; ASCJ Monthly Reports, January, February and May 1865; and LTC Minutes, 17 January and 21 February 1865.

³ *Bee-Hive*, 14 January 1865.

the *Bee-Hive* increased proportionately, and continued to do so during the disputes of the next few months. In March and April, at the height of the excitement over the North Staffordshire puddlers' strike and the subsequent lock-out, the circulation passed the 8,000 mark;¹ and the *Bee-Hive's* support for the puddlers established the paper's reputation, for a time at least, with many of the provincial unions. While Potter's attitude was probably based on an emotional preference for militant action and solidarity among workers, he could not have been unaware of the fact that it was at such periods of crisis that his type of leadership was at a premium, and the sales of the *Bee-Hive* could most easily be increased. His opponents were only too well aware of it; and they missed no opportunity of using this in backing up their accusations, insisting that the stirring up and prolonging of disputes was Potter's chosen means of gaining publicity for himself and increasing the popularity of his paper.

The North Staffordshire puddlers' strike started in January 1865, as a protest against a 10% wage reduction. When the ironmasters in February threatened a general lock-out, John Kane, president of the Northern section of the National Association of Ironworkers, took the view that in the interests of their fellow-workers the North Staffordshire men should call off the strike. This course was recommended by a delegate meeting of Ironworkers' representatives. But the strikers refused to return to work; and the lock-out was imposed throughout South Staffordshire, and to a limited extent in other iron-working areas, on 4 March.

The events that followed brought into sharp relief the conflict between the trade union leaders in London. George Troup was sent to Staffordshire as special reporter for the *Bee-Hive*, and week after week his reports, putting strongly the case for the original strikers, filled four and sometimes five columns of the paper. While Odger, on behalf of the Trades Council, was collecting information about the dispute, Potter called a delegate meeting of the London trades by notice in the *Bee-Hive*, and opened a subscription list. The justification for this step, Potter argued, was the need for immediate action if the puddlers were to be saved from defeat. But he had made no attempt to urge the Trades Council officials to hasten their investigation; and while he no doubt realised that this would have been unlikely to have any effect, he could at least have forestalled much criticism by such a move, and morally strengthened his case. It seems clear that Potter preferred to act independently, and that he was in fact deliberately challenging the authority of the Trades Council.

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 27 May 1865.

The *Bee-Hive* meeting was held, with Potter in the chair, on 15 March. The Trades Council called their own delegate meeting for 23 March; and until the end of April the rival meetings continued, Potter's adjourning from week to week, the Trades Council calling almost weekly either a delegate meeting or a meeting of the Council members. Potter's meeting passed a resolution urging that arbitration should be accepted if the lock-out were first called off, and Troup reported that this policy was immediately adopted by the North Staffordshire men. The Trades Council resolution – to which Potter unsuccessfully moved an amendment – was in favour of unconditional arbitration on the whole dispute. All these meetings were reported in the *Bee-Hive*. But while Potter's were reported in full detail, Hartwell more than once found that he had room for only a "condensed version" of the Trades Council's proceedings. Although the first of the Trades Council's delegate meetings decided that the Council too should collect subscriptions, this decision was omitted from the *Bee-Hive* report. Within a fortnight, on Lord Lichfield's offer of arbitration being refused by the puddlers, the list was closed; but this fact was not mentioned in the *Bee-Hive* note which, after nearly another two weeks had passed, proudly contrasted the totals of the two funds. Nor did the *Bee-Hive* print a letter from Lord Lichfield, which appeared in the *Times*, complaining that the *Bee-Hive*'s special reporter had misrepresented the terms of his offer.¹

The rival meetings included some wild scenes, and much angry recrimination. At Potter's first meeting, George Howell, representing the Operative Bricklayers, interrupted proceedings at the start to declare that it was "an illegal meeting"; but a large majority voted that proceedings should continue, and other members of the Bricklayers' Executive Council were refused a hearing. The scenes became wilder after the Trades Council had passed a vote of censure on Potter and the *Bee-Hive* at a special meeting held on 29 March. It was at this meeting, called at the request of the Bricklayers to consider Potter's conduct, that Danter denounced Potter as "a strike-jobber", who "made the *Bee-Hive* newspaper his instrument for pushing his nose into every unfortunate dispute that sprang up". Eventually three resolutions were passed. The second of these dealt with a visit Potter had just paid to North Staffordshire, where he told the puddlers of the efforts being made on their behalf in London. This had been undertaken "without the knowledge or sanction" of the Trades Council,

¹ Hartwell asserted that this letter was never sent to the *Bee-Hive*; but the committee that investigated Odger's charges held that it should have been reprinted from the *Times*, since Troup "made it the subject of an elaborate reply" in the *Bee-Hive*'s next issue (*Bee-Hive*, 24 June 1865).

and in the opinion of the Council “the only object he had in view was to promote the interests of the *Bee-Hive*”. The third expressed surprise that the *Bee-Hive* report had not mentioned the Trades Council’s decision to collect subscriptions. But it was the first resolution, moved by Coulson, that made quite clear the issues involved:

“That this meeting regrets and condemns the course taken by Mr. G. Potter in calling a meeting of the Trades’ delegates on the dispute in the iron trades without first consulting the London Trades Council of which he is a member; and considers that meetings so called by any unauthorised person or persons are dangerous, as resolutions may be passed in them pledging Societies to principles that would be prejudicial to their influence and material prosperity, and place the Trade Societies in a false position before the public.”

As Odger explained in the Council’s next Annual Report, they were “determined to preserve the character of delegate meetings”.

In this matter, the Trades Council had a perfectly good case. Potter’s meetings might better have been described as public meetings of trade unionists and sympathisers; and although at the later ones some effort seems to have been made to check the credentials of those attending, they were clearly a floating body of representatives, overweighted by carpenters and painters, who could not compete with the Council’s claim to be a permanent and responsible organisation. But Potter’s opponents on the Council had gone some way towards spoiling their case by the methods they employed. The special meeting was called at short notice for an evening when one of Potter’s own meetings was to be held, with Potter himself in the chair, and Council members who might have supported him probably in attendance. Applegarth claimed that every effort had been made to allow Potter to defend himself, since the discussion on his conduct did not begin until 10.30; but Potter’s meeting was still in session, and he remained in the chair. The Trades Council resolutions were discussed and voted upon by only six of the fifteen members – Mark Mildred, of the Silver Cup Carpenters, who generally supported Potter but seems to have been unable to contribute much to this discussion through being in the chair, James Cope, of the West End Bootclosers, Coulson, Applegarth, Danter and Odger. Two “star performers”, as Hartwell described them, had also been called in. William Allan had been deputed by his Executive to place their views before the Council, and Howell attended as a “special delegate” from the Operative Bricklayers’ Society.

Potter's reply to the vote of censure was to assert, at meetings and in the *Bee-Hive*, that the Trades Council had passed into the hands of a clique who had lost the confidence of the majority of London trade unionists, and that it ought to be completely reconstituted. Before his meeting of the following week he circularised his supporters to ensure a full attendance, and they then proceeded to pass a counter-resolution condemning the Trades Council's action. At this meeting Howell and Odger were both shouted down, Odger while trying to make a speech outlining the charges against Potter that were later placed before an investigating committee; and proceedings ended with "Three cheers for Mr. Potter, three cheers for the *Bee-Hive*, and three groans for the Clique". The lock-out was brought to an end in mid-April, but the North Staffordshire puddlers by that time were not prepared to accept arbitration unless they had first returned to work at the old wages. When the Trades Council brought Lord Lichfield to a delegate meeting on 25 April, Potter telegraphed for two of the North Staffordshire men to put their case at the same meeting – which, after Lichfield had left, appears to have broken up in confusion. "The Trades Council have thrown down the gauntlet", wrote Hartwell excitedly in the *Bee-Hive* of 1 April. "We shall not be afraid to take it up. May truth and justice defend the right!" During the next few weeks, while Potter made his speeches, Hartwell supported him with his pen; and Hartwell's comments on the characters and policies of "the Clique", both in editorials and under his old pen-name of "Scourge", left no doubt that the *Bee-Hive* had indeed taken up the gauntlet.¹

Although the puddlers' strike dragged on for some weeks longer, without achieving its object, in London the open conflict resulting from it had come to fill the centre of the stage. Already, the struggle had spread into the Reform movement. The Reform League, which was to become one of the most famous political associations of the eighteen-sixties, had been established at a meeting called by Potter in February. The purpose of the meeting – suggested to Potter by Mason Jones, an Irish Radical who had been prominent in the pro-Northern agitation – was to bring together into one body the various Reform associations that had grown up in London. This aim was largely accomplished. But Potter, preoccupied with the iron trades dispute, soon lost his influence over the new League; and for this reason, his part in founding it has usually passed unnoticed by

¹ For the whole episode, see *Bee-Hive*, 4 February to 29 April 1865; *Miner and Workman's Advocate*, 25 March to 29 April 1865; *LTC Minutes*, and 1865 Annual Report; *ASCJ Monthly Reports*, April and May 1865; and *LTC pamphlet, Mr. Potter and the London Trades Council* (Howell Collection).

historians. His first real attempt to play an active part in the Reform movement was in any event unwelcome to many of those who had been active for years, and he does not appear to have sought office – Edmond Beales, whose successful presidency of the National Polish League had made him an obvious choice, became president at the start. At the same time, Hartwell was elected provisional secretary. Although Hartwell had been secretary to the Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association,¹ which was now merged in the Reform League, it soon became imperative, from the point of view of Applegarth, Odger and their friends, that he too must be removed from any position of influence. In April, Howell was voted into office as permanent secretary.²

By this time it was almost impossible for active trade unionists in London to avoid taking sides, while the provincial unions were becoming increasingly involved. Applegarth's leadership had given cohesion as well as drive to the anti-Potter forces; and the Trades Council vote of censure had clarified the issues. Until the puddlers' strike, Allan had paid very little attention to either Potter or the *Bee-Hive*. From then on, he was ranged firmly alongside Applegarth, Odger and Coulson in opposition. Howell was never on good terms with Coulson,³ while Cremer seems at one time or another to have quarrelled with almost everybody, including Applegarth; but in the struggle with Potter they were in complete agreement with their respective secretaries. Against the growing power of the amalgamated societies and their leaders, Potter could count on the support of the London Stonemasons, the smaller societies of carpenters and of painters, and a number of the other small London unions, such as the Tin Plate Workers and the Ropemakers. Daniel Guile, the Iron-founders' secretary, has been accorded a place in history as a member of the Junta, but it was not until joining the Conference of Amalgamated Trades in January 1867 that he broke with Potter, while another much-respected secretary, Thomas Dunning of the London Consolidated Bookbinders, remained on Potter's side throughout the quarrel.⁴ Both Guile and Dunning appear to have had the general

¹ Founded as the Trade Union Political Union in November 1862, mainly through the efforts of Odger and Applegarth, and with strong support from Hartwell in the *Bee-Hive*. It was Hartwell's work for the Garibaldi demonstration that brought him the secretaryship of the Association when it was reorganised in 1864.

² *Bee-Hive*, 25 February and 15 and 22 April 1865; 15 September and 3 and 10 November 1866; and 8 December 1866 to 19 January 1867.

³ Howell thought Coulson was "coarse and vulgar"; Coulson regarded Howell as "a snob". They were both right.

⁴ Dunning's position was somewhat peculiar. He was never regarded as a militant, and his writings have often been quoted to show the development of the new approach to

approval of their unions for this attitude, even if other members showed no marked enthusiasm; but there were also of course individual loyalties that cut across the division between unions – for instance, Frederick Whetstone of the ASE supported Potter against his own society's secretary, while more than one ASCJ branch passed resolutions favourable to Potter.

Outside London, Potter and the *Bee-Hive* had the determined backing of Robert Last and his General Union of Carpenters, whose approval increased in proportion to Applegarth's attacks. Similarly, Potter was able to appeal to all the provincial trade unionists who were coming to resent the claims to national leadership put forward by the amalgamated society secretaries in London, and from the middle of 1865 this was to be an increasingly deliberate policy. In June the Staffordshire Ironworkers reciprocated the *Bee-Hive's* support for their strike by taking out 200 shares;¹ and of the unions newly subscribing for shares during the next nine months, more than three-quarters were Northern or Midland unions. It is true that the Glasgow Trades Council and the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades, two of the most important Trades Councils outside London, had followed the lead of the London Trades Council; but against this could be set at least the support of two of the smaller ones, those of Burton and Derby.

In the columns of the *Bee-Hive* itself, Potter's greatest asset was of course the loyal support of Robert Hartwell. A large proportion of the *Bee-Hive's* contents was written by Hartwell, whose vigorous, fighting style, and gift for angry denunciation, were much appreciated by many of the paper's working-class readers. Potter's literary style was much less highly-coloured; and at this stage he seems to have written very little outside the columns of "trades intelligence", which were always regarded as his particular province. Hartwell was in fact prepared as editor to take sole responsibility for the views expressed in the *Bee-Hive*, as well as for the general tone of the paper, and he made this point strongly when defending Potter before the committee that investigated Odger's charges. The invective was certainly Hartwell's, and there is no reason to suppose that his attacks on "the Clique" were written unwillingly. Nevertheless, it is clear that Potter, with a friendly Board of Directors, was in a position to control policy

industrial relations, even before the Junta appeared on the scene. But Dunning was "the father of London trade unionism"; and he obviously resented the attempts of these newer men to extend their control over the policies of other unions.

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 10 June 1865. The North Staffordshire men had broken away from the National Association, and with other groups from South Staffordshire they had started a separate union, the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain.

whenever he wished to do so; and Hartwell, questioned on this by the investigating committee, “admitted that he would not like to oppose the manager with regard to matter to be inserted or not in the *Bee-Hive*”.¹

While mutual recriminations were still at their height, the half-yearly meeting of shareholders was held on 25 May. An exchange of correspondence between Marx and Engels earlier in the month gives the impression that they were expecting a number of their allies to attend as new shareholders, and Marx was optimistic about the possibilities of getting “this rat of a man” – Potter – “under our thumbs”.² The opposition may have received reinforcements; but if so, they were quite inadequate for Marx’s purpose. Potter reported on the increase in circulation – now running at 7,500, and “upwards of 8,000 copies for some weeks” during the Staffordshire dispute – and followed this with his financial statement, which showed an increase of £ 440 from sales and advertisements as against the corresponding period of 1864. Dell, Coulson, Odger and others raised objections to the statement, and criticised Potter’s management of the paper; but the report and financial statement were adopted by the meeting. Odger then moved once more that the balance sheet should be printed and circulated to shareholders. After a discussion described in the *Bee-Hive* report as “noisy and irregular”, during which Coulson was shouted down, this motion was defeated. There was one further attempt to discredit Potter. William Harry of the ASCJ proposed “that Mr. Potter be requested to transfer the registration of the title of the paper, which at present stands in his name, to that of the Trades Newspaper Co., Ltd.”. Potter had registered the *Bee-Hive* at Stationers’ Hall ten days before the company was incorporated, and although the Articles of Association had then laid down that the copyright “shall be transferred to the company”, he had not bothered to re-register it. This fact had only recently become generally known, and it was taken as further evidence of Potter’s desire to act as the unquestioned proprietor of the *Bee-Hive*. However, Dunning insisted that such a resolution would be equivalent to a vote of no confidence; and eventually an amendment – that the paper be re-registered “in the name of Mr. Potter on behalf of” the company – was triumphantly carried “by an overwhelming majority”.³

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 24 June 1865.

² Marx to Engels, 9 May 1865; Engels to Marx, 12 May 1865 (MEGA, Vol. III, pp. 268, 270).

³ *Bee-Hive*, 27 May 1865. The Stationers’ Hall register (now in the Public Record Office) shows the *Bee-Hive* as first registered on 16 September 1861, with George Potter named as “proprietor of the copyright”; and re-registered on 31 May 1865, in accordance with the shareholders’ resolution.

In June, the investigating committee published their verdict on Odger's charges. These charges had first been made by Odger amidst much confusion at Potter's meeting on 5 April, and were repeated by him in the calmer atmosphere of the Trades Council meeting held on the following evening. When Potter accepted his challenge to have them investigated by an independent committee, the whole affair was treated with the utmost formality. Edmond Beales was chairman of the committee, the other members being Godfrey Lushington, Frederic Harrison and Thomas Hughes. Mark Mildred, Daniel Guile, and Thomas Dunning attended the investigation on behalf of Potter, while William Allan, John D. Nieass of the Plasterers' Union, and William Hammett, secretary to the City Ladies' Shoemakers, represented Odger. A number of witnesses appeared for each side. Three meetings were necessary to complete the investigation, and these were held in Beales's chambers early in May.

Odger had prepared a written statement, arranging his charges under nine heads. The one that might have been most damaging to Potter's personal character was based on accusations by Robert Tilling, who had done the printing for the Building Trades Conference, and who alleged that Potter had kept for himself "20% of the whole of the money" drawn from Conference funds for printing costs. Potter had failed, claimed Odger, to keep his promise – made "to secure his place as treasurer to the Garibaldi Committee" – that he would "take the case before a court of justice". Three of the other charges dealt with Dell's original loan and the conditions attached, Potter's support for Troup and his pro-Southern policies, and the lack of "invoices or vouchers" during the *Bee-Hive's* first two years. The remainder may be summarised as follows: – That Potter had registered the *Bee-Hive*, and allowed it to remain registered, as his own property; invented the Commons Club and praised "bubble companies" for the sake of advertisements; published incorrect reports and suppressed letters which were critical of his policy; packed meetings with his own supporters called by private circular; and played a "mischievous and untruthful" part during the puddlers' strike and lock-out.

It has generally been assumed, on the strength of the verdict, that these charges "as a whole, collapsed when investigated", as Raymond Postgate puts it.¹ Whether Potter had in fact kept back a percentage of the money drawn from the builders' funds for printing was never

¹ The Builders' History, 1923, p. 217. Roberts states, in a remarkably misleading footnote, that "Potter was completely cleared of the six charges of fraud and misappropriation of money, and more or less vindicated on the charges involving the editorial policy of the *Bee-Hive*" (The Trades Union Congress, 1868-1921, p. 26).

proved, since Tilling refused to attend or to send his books to the investigation. But Odger was correct in asserting that Potter had taken no steps to clear himself. As for the remaining charges, although Odger in his indignation had exaggerated the enormity of the offences, the general picture he gave of Potter's behaviour and his management of the *Bee-Hive* was certainly based upon fact. Even if Dell could not prove that he had laid down conditions, Potter had undoubtedly started the *Bee-Hive* as a "private speculation". On the pro-Southern policy, the registration of the paper, the fiction of the Commons Club, the inaccurate reports and the suppression of critical letters, the evidence shows that Odger was right; while there is also a good deal of evidence to support his accusations of the packing of meetings and the lack of strict accountancy in the *Bee-Hive* office.

However, the charges were not worded with sufficient care to ensure their acceptance by this committee of lawyers; and the evidence on Odger's side was poorly presented. Equally important was the fact that Beales was already practising the role of peacemaker which he was to perform with so much success as president of the Reform League, and his main desire appears to have been to smooth matters over. The *Bee-Hive* Directors protested that more than half the charges were concerned with the management of the paper, and therefore the present and past Directors were also implicated; and the further complication of Hartwell's editorial responsibility added to what the committee described as "the difficulty of treating Mr. Potter as solely responsible" – either for the management or for the contents of the paper. This enabled them to avoid giving a definite verdict on those charges which the Directors claimed were made "against the *Bee-Hive* rather than against Mr. Potter", and which the committee agreed they were really "not entitled to investigate". As a result, their final report was extremely non-committal. While they accepted the fact that Potter had made no attempt to clear himself by legal proceedings from the accusation made by Tilling, in spite of Montague Leveson's offer to act for him, they "could not proceed further" on this without Tilling's evidence. Apart from this charge, the only ones on which they returned an unqualified verdict of "not proved" were those relating to the alleged deception of William Dell, which depended merely on his word against Potter's, and the registration of the copyright, which really went by default through the failure of Odger's side to produce a copy of the original entry at Stationers' Hall. What did emerge from the committee's report – in addition to their strongly expressed hope that the whole matter would now be dropped and the two parties would work together in the future – was their rather cautious agreement with the criticisms based on what had happened

during the puddlers' strike and lock-out. Both Potter and Hartwell, they decided, were deserving of some censure for the insertion of inaccurate reports and the suppression of letters criticising their policy, while Potter ought at least to have requested more rapid Trades Council action before beginning to call his own meetings.¹

In spite of this mild censure, Potter's friends were jubilant at what they represented as a complete victory; and the verdict did nothing to improve relations between the two parties. In the same issue of the *Bee-Hive* which reported the findings of the committee there appeared a letter from William Hamlyn, secretary to the Camberwell Society of Carpenters and an ex-Director of the Trades Newspaper Co., repeating a suggestion he had made at one of Potter's meetings – that a Testimonial Fund should be started as a practical demonstration of support for Potter. A committee was at once set up to collect subscriptions. When the annual delegate meeting of the Trades Council was called for 21 August, the *Bee-Hive* again urged the "entire reconstruction of the Council".² Potter restarted his delegate meetings, which passed resolutions expressing their "deep indignation and disgust at the whole proceedings" of the Trades Council, and their view that the first move in its reconstruction must be "the exclusion of the Six".³ All this eventually called forth a letter from Professor Beesly, setting out in no uncertain terms the case against such meetings. Beesly, although one of the earliest shareholders and a fairly frequent contributor, was often highly critical of the *Bee-Hive*; and at this period he was mainly concerned to defend the Trades Council.⁴ He saw nothing to convince him in the argument, put forward by Potter and Hartwell, that the Trades Council was not fully representative, and that the *Bee-Hive's* special position as "the organ of the Trades in general" justified them in calling together representatives from all those London unions prepared to send them. If unions were not represented on the Trades Council, said Beesly, it was their own fault. The conductors of the *Bee-Hive* had a perfect right to criticise the Trades Council; but not to attempt to usurp its functions. "The idea of a newspaper rivalling or superseding a representative body is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of. Let

¹ The complete report, which included Odger's statement, was published in the *Bee-Hive* of 24 June 1865, together with lengthy comments by Hartwell. The report also appeared in the *Miner and Workman's Advocate* on the same day.

² *Bee-Hive*, 29 July 1865.

³ *Bee-Hive*, 19 and 26 August 1865.

⁴ For Beesly's relations with working-class organisations and newspapers, see: Royden Harrison, "Professor Beesly and the Working-class Movement", in: *Essays in Labour History*, ed. A. Briggs and J. Saville. See also: Royden Harrison, "E. S. Beesly and Karl Marx", in: *International Review of Social History*, Vol. IV (1959), Parts 1 and 2.

the *Bee-Hive* confine itself to the proper functions of a newspaper . . .”¹

The annual meeting accepted Odger’s report, including the paragraph which criticised Potter – in spite of Potter’s threat that this would “tend to the setting up of a separate organisation”. The meeting was adjourned until 4 September; and it was then that what Hartwell called the “excommunication” of the *Bee-Hive* took place. William Allan moved, and it was agreed by a large majority, that the resolution which had made the *Bee-Hive* the official organ of the Trades Council should be “expunged from the Minutes”. This was greeted with much indignation by Hartwell in the editorial columns, but it was after all only a recognition of the existing situation. Presumably Potter and Hartwell had hoped that the *Bee-Hive* might remain the organ of a Trades Council purged of their chief opponents. There had in fact been important changes of personnel when the new Council was elected – Coulson and Applegarth, as well as Potter, failed to secure re-election – but it soon became clear that this meant no fundamental change in policy.

The “excommunication” coincided, as it was no doubt intended to do, with two other attacks on the *Bee-Hive*’s position. Besides their control of the Trades Council, the Junta group also provided the leading figures among the English section of the General Council of the International. Applegarth had become a member in January; and it was largely on Applegarth’s initiative that the next move came. During August, the main members of the General Council were engaged in setting up the Industrial Newspaper Co., Ltd., which was to take over control of the *Miner and Workman’s Advocate*, and launch this paper afresh as an avowed rival of the *Bee-Hive*. The two papers were already on the worst of terms, and John Towers, the editor of the *Miner and Workman’s Advocate*, had come down heavily against Potter during the London quarrel. But this was really incidental to his main purpose, which was to discredit Alexander Macdonald and the National Association of Mineworkers. On this front, he was fighting a losing battle; and when Macdonald won a libel action against Towers, the proprietor – William Whitehorn – was only too glad to dispose of his paper. On 9 September 1865, it first appeared under its new title of the *Workman’s Advocate*, as the official organ of the International. Although not recognised, as the *Bee-Hive* had been, by formal resolution, the *Workman’s Advocate* became more or less automatically an organ of the Trades Council as well. Reports of the International’s meetings ceased to appear in the *Bee-Hive*, while Trades Council reports, although still published, were usually abbreviated to fit some obscure corner.

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 30 September 1865.

The second line of attack seemed more likely to have an immediately damaging effect. William Dell's £ 120 had been outstanding from the beginning; and additional loans before he resigned with his fellow-Directors had brought the total to £ 240. At the end of August he demanded repayment of the whole sum, plus interest, within a month. When Potter on behalf of the Directors replied that the notice was too short, Dell put the matter in the hands of his solicitor; and a special meeting of shareholders was called for 4 October. The chairman of the Directors, Roger Grey of the Stonemasons, declared that in his view "the real object was to wind up the company". Grey then put from the chair a resolution that the Directors should be empowered to raise, "by loan or otherwise", a sufficient sum to meet Dell's claim. This resolution was carried – after a discussion in which Coulson, whose methods of fighting were cruder than Applegarth's, suggested that Potter might devote the proceeds of his Testimonial Fund to repaying Dell, and then put his fingers to his nose in a gesture described in the *Bee-Hive* report as "taking a sight" at the shareholders who shouted "Turn him out!"¹ Dell, who in spite of his disapproval of Potter seems in the last resort to have had some doubts about the wisdom of destroying the *Bee-Hive*, was persuaded to agree to a compromise. When the annual general meeting of shareholders was held two months later, Potter was able to announce that Dell had accepted £ 56 in cash, and a promise to pay the remainder in four quarterly instalments.

This annual general meeting was described in the *Bee-Hive* as "the most satisfactory meeting of shareholders yet held". Few of Potter's opponents were present, and the prevailing mood was one of confidence in the *Bee-Hive*'s prospects. Late in the evening there was a rather half-hearted attack on Hartwell's "strong language" – to which Hartwell retorted "Am I to treat such men like sucking doves?" – but the criticism was easily brushed aside. The main item of business was the Directors' proposal to increase the company's nominal capital to £ 3,750, by the issue of 5,000 "preferential" shares at 10/– each, to bear interest at 5%. Potter had reported that in the second half-year there had been an increase in liabilities, again through "the efforts made to improve the *Bee-Hive*"; and from the statement which accompanied the preference shares proposal it appears that the company was still some £ 850 in debt. But receipts over the year were £ 577 higher than the previous year's, and it was assumed that the paper might now be expected to show a reasonable profit. Troup, supporting the new share issue, voiced the general feeling when he

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 7 October 1865.

argued that instead of paying interest to their creditors the shareholders “might endeavour to pay it to themselves”.¹

At the close of 1865, the *Bee-Hive* shareholders still had some justification for feeling optimistic about the future. In London the attacks had so far had little practical effect, in spite of the “excommunication”, while in the provinces the *Bee-Hive*’s prestige was higher than it had ever been. Readers were left in no doubt that it was primarily a “trades newspaper”, since the challenge of the *Workman’s Advocate* was met with yet further efforts to increase the volume of trade union news, but they found in it also a wide coverage of less specialised news, and much outspoken radical comment on important political and social questions of the day. In general, its contents were ably written; and the “strong language” which Hartwell often permitted himself to use had its own appeal for many readers. The early excitement of the quarrel was subsiding, and Hartwell’s attacks were becoming less frequent, but they still had something of the attraction of a serial story, leaving the reader wondering what would next be disclosed to the disadvantage of “the Clique”. The circulation was presumably lower than it had been in April, but there is no evidence of any serious decrease. As the circulation had reached respectable figures, advertisements had naturally become easier to obtain, and in the last few weeks of the year they regularly filled not only the back page but some three to four additional columns inside the paper. Preference shares were quickly taken up by a number of provincial unions, and a few of the smaller London ones; and the burden of debt seemed likely to be eased.

IV

The next two and a half years were to see the decline of the *Bee-Hive* from the successes of 1865, and with it the decline of Potter’s influence as a trade union leader. But there was no indication of this in the early months of 1866. In March, at an enthusiastic meeting, Potter was presented with his illuminated address and a purse of 300 sovereigns – made up of subscriptions from trade unionists in most of the industrial areas as well as London, and also from a number of middle-class Reformers.² The new London Working Men’s Association – Potter’s “separate organisation” – had already been established, at a meeting held on 16 February. It was asserted at the start that the Association was not intended to be “antagonistic to the Reform

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 9 December 1865.

² *Bee-Hive*, 17 March 1866.

League”; but the fact that the League was dominated by Potter’s opponents made antagonism more or less inevitable.¹ The very name of the Association, with its deliberate appeal to lingering Chartist sentiments, was in the nature of a challenge. However, the LWMA was meant to be more than just another political body. The first published statement of its aims and proposed methods claimed that “the above Association materially differs from any other society in its purposes”, since it was to concern itself with social and industrial as well as political matters. The inclusion of industrial aims was of course a challenge to the London Trades Council; but membership was not to be confined to trade unionists. Not only “all persons belonging to the Industrial Classes” – including “labourers of every description” – but also “others willing to promote its objects”, were invited to pay the very modest subscription of 1/- a year which would entitle them to membership.²

Thereafter meetings were called, and subscription lists were opened, in the name of the Association. During 1866 the Sheffield file grinders, the Manchester carpenters, and the National Association of Ironworkers, all engaged in disputes with their employers, were assisted with subscriptions collected by the LWMA. But Potter was president and Hartwell was secretary of the Association, after the first few weeks Troup became treasurer, and the executive committee was mainly composed of men who were already their supporters; so that the only difference this made was that the conductors of the *Bee-Hive* now had the backing of a permanent organisation. The policies adopted by the LWMA, and those advocated in the *Bee-Hive*, were of course identical. Less obvious, since the aims of the rival organisations were so often obscured by the conflict between them, was the fact that these policies frequently differed only in emphasis from those of the Reform League and the London Trades Council. Like the Reform League, the LWMA aimed at manhood suffrage and the ballot. As compared with the Trades Council, the Association was readier to grant assistance without overmuch investigation; but George Troup, as their representative at the Sheffield Conference of July 1866, stated as a matter of agreed policy that no workers who refused arbitration would be supported. During the lock-out of the Sheffield file grinders, both the LWMA and the Trades Council were urging London trade unionists to subscribe generously.

In the *Bee-Hive*, there were fewer personal attacks on “the Clique”

¹ Potter and Hartwell remained members of the League’s Executive Council until the elections of October 1866, but few of the other members could be ranked among their supporters.

² *Bee-Hive*, 2 June 1866.

during 1866. But in the earlier part of the year, there was a good deal of unfavourable comment on the policies of the amalgamated societies. Their concern for friendly benefits, it was argued, had made them over-cautious in all other matters – an argument which Thomas Dunning had developed at some length in an article in the *Bookbinders' Trade Circular*, reprinted in the *Bee-Hive* on 10 February. The ASE in particular, said Dunning, had become “simply a benefit society”. The ASE soon showed that he had over-stated his case, by granting £ 1,000 to the Sheffield file grinders. But there was enough truth in the argument to make it a useful weapon. Potter used it on several occasions during the next couple of years.¹

Throughout 1866 Potter and Hartwell continued to point out, quite justifiably, that the amount of trade union news in the *Bee-Hive* far exceeded that in any other paper. Although this meant a heavy drain on the *Bee-Hive's* financial resources, they were setting a standard which the *Workman's Advocate* – or *Commonwealth*, as it was called from 10 February² – had no hope of attaining. In March Robert Last had stated that he could “distinctly trace the establishment” of fifteen new lodges of the GUC to their weekly advertisement, and the reports of their activities, in the *Bee-Hive*.³ The occasion was the first anniversary meeting of the first of the General Union's lodges to have been established in London. A second had recently been started; and Potter was eagerly supporting Last's efforts to extend the influence of his union in London, in opposition to the ASCJ. In return, as was shown by the published lists of unions holding the new preference shares, lodges of the GUC were becoming shareholders in the Trades Newspaper Co. By the beginning of April, 23 unions had subscribed for these shares, the majority from widely scattered provincial centres. They covered also a wide range of trades; but nine from the provinces were small carpenters' societies, seven of which had GUC added after their names on the next return to the Registrar. They were in fact among those local societies which at that time were becoming lodges of the General Union, while retaining their local names and a far greater degree of autonomy than was allowed to branches of the ASCJ.

¹ E.g., “I am against amalgamation except for trade purposes; otherwise these are made subservient to benefits.” (From a speech to the Friends of Freedom Carpenters, reported in the *Bee-Hive* of 14 December 1867.)

² The change of name marked a shift of emphasis in policy. A group of middle-class Reformers, headed by Thomas Hughes, had taken out shares in the Industrial Newspaper Co. Their money was urgently needed; but their influence had the effect of toning down the paper's political comment – much to Marx's annoyance, as he showed in his correspondence.

³ *Bee-Hive*, 31 March 1866.

In May, an important future development was foreshadowed, when the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades decided to call a national Trade Union Conference. The LWMA, already considering calling such a Conference themselves, greeted the news with rather more enthusiasm than did the London Trades Council; and a *Bee-Hive* editorial on 12 May declared that the time had come for the unions to establish a Labour Parliament, meeting annually. George Troup, attending the Conference as delegate from the LWMA, acted also as special reporter for the *Bee-Hive*, and wrote a full account of the proceedings which overlapped into four successive issues.¹ This was the Conference at which the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades, intended to provide mutual aid in the event of lock-outs, was set up, with its headquarters in Sheffield. It was unfortunate for the sponsors of the Alliance that only three months later Sheffield leapt into notoriety through one of the worst of its “trade outrages”. The *Bee-Hive*’s response to the outburst of indignation in the national press was to repudiate any suggestion of trade union sympathy for such actions, and the LWMA at once held a special meeting to embody the editorial view in resolutions. The London Trades Council went still further. Odger and Danter were sent to Sheffield on a mission of investigation, and a deputation to the Home Secretary asked for a government enquiry.²

Meanwhile the Reform movement, as it continued to gain in strength, was claiming an ever-increasing share of the *Bee-Hive*’s space. Political events moved fast during 1866. Gladstone’s introduction of a limited Reform Bill in March, Robert Lowe’s anti-Reform speeches and the formation of the “Cave of Adullam”, the defeat of the Bill and the fall of the government by the end of June, provided both exciting news and the subject of much of Hartwell’s editorial comment. On 7 April almost the whole front page was devoted to the report of a meeting convened by the LWMA with the object of “calling on the House of Commons to vote the second reading” of the government’s Reform Bill. At this meeting Dunning made what he described as his “first political speech”, and other speakers included Daniel Guile, Thomas Connolly of the London Stonemasons, and Joseph Leicester of the Flint Glass Blowers, all of them, like Dunning, foundation members of the Association. In the issue of 28 July only slightly less space was given to the Reform League demonstration on “the day the railings went down” in Hyde Park. This was followed by a joint meeting in the Guildhall on 8 August, again fully reported in the *Bee-Hive*.

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 21 July to 11 August 1866.

² *Bee-Hive*, 13 and 20 October and 24 November 1866; LTC Minutes.

At the Guildhall meeting, Beales put the motion in favour of manhood suffrage and the ballot, while Connolly moved that “all sympathy and support” should be withheld from the new Conservative government until a satisfactory measure of Reform had been granted. Each motion was seconded by a member of the rival association, Beales’s by Potter, and Connolly’s by Odger. But the brief period of harmony between the two associations, made possible by the enthusiasm of the moment, was soon ended. On 15 August it was proposed at a meeting of the Executive Council of the Reform League that the *Commonwealth* should become the special organ of the League. Hartwell, assuming once more his old pen-name of “Scourge”, claimed that the *Bee-Hive* had at least an equal right to this recognition; and eventually, after acrimonious discussions that took up most of the time at three successive meetings of the Council, it was decided not to adopt any one paper as the League’s organ.¹ Three weeks later – on 22 September – the *Bee-Hive* sub-title was changed from “A Journal of General Intelligence, Advocating Industrial Interests”, which it had borne since January 1863, to “A Journal of General Intelligence, the Organ of Industrial Interests and the Reform Movement”. Hartwell had already appealed on the front page of the previous issue for reports of all Reform activities, on the grounds that “The *Bee-Hive* is generally recognised as the London organ of the Reform movement”.

In this rivalry, the conductors of the *Commonwealth* – also sub-titled “The Organ of the Reform Movement” – had some advantage, since they could rely on an abundant supply of material from the Reform League branches, only a few of which sent in reports to the *Bee-Hive*; but Hartwell made up for this with his far more readable accounts of the activities of the LWMA. During October and November, much space was given to advance publicity for the Association’s Trades Reform demonstration, which was intended to provide final proof of the breakdown of the old “non-political” attitude among trade unionists. The demonstration, held in the grounds of Beaufort House on 3 December, was indeed an impressive argument for this point of view, in spite of the efforts of Applegarth, Coulson and Allan to discourage their members from taking part in it. It certainly impressed John Bright, who, addressing a crowded meeting arranged for the following evening as a climax to the proceedings, congratulated the unions on at last making a stand for Reform. One thing that stood out clearly was the fact that with many of the smaller London unions, and even some London branches of the ASCJ, Potter’s influence, once

¹ Minutes of the Executive Council of the Reform League, 15, 18, 24 and 31 August 1866 (Howell Collection); *Bee-Hive*, 18 August to 8 September 1866.

he had become fully involved in the Reform movement, had been sufficient to tip the balance. The Reform League had sent a contingent to the demonstration; and although the *Commonwealth*, and Howell in his private correspondence, expressed some criticism of the arrangements, the League's Executive Council passed a resolution congratulating Potter.¹ Even the *Times* estimated that the procession was 25,000 strong, adding: "We must express our admiration of the behaviour of all who actually took part in the day's proceedings."² The report in the next issue of the *Bee-Hive* took up almost two pages.

There was nothing in all this to suggest any falling away of support, either for Potter or for the *Bee-Hive*; but the reports of the shareholders' meetings, and the 1866 return to the Registrar of Companies, show that the paper's position was somewhat less satisfactory than might have been expected. The half-yearly meeting appears to have transacted no business except the adoption of Potter's report and financial statement. There was a small profit on "the half-year's working", and all the shareholders mentioned were reported to have spoken in favour of the adoption.³ None of Potter's opponents was present; nor did they attend the annual general meeting in December. Apart from the election of three new Directors – one of whom was George Troup – this meeting followed much the same pattern as the previous one. Again, a small profit was reported. Potter's statements at the two meetings indicate that income and expenditure were both running at a higher figure than in the previous year; but insufficient details were given for any assessment of how the totals were made up. However, at the annual general meeting Potter did make one very revealing statement: "Although there are yet some liabilities upon the paper, your Directors would remind the shareholders that the unsold shares are not only sufficient to meet these liabilities, but if they were all taken up there would be a balance in favour of £ 1,800."⁴ When this figure is deducted from the value of the shares still unsold when the return to the Registrar was made up in October, the difference is £ 845 : 10 : 0 – very little less than the company's liabilities a year earlier.

According to the 1866 return, 3,672 of the original shares had been taken up – an increase of 577 since the previous return in 1864; but only 373 of the preference shares. After the first burst of enthusiasm

¹ *Commonwealth*, 24 November 1866; George Howell to J. Macintyre, 5 December 1866 (Reform League Letter Book); Minutes of the Executive Council of the Reform League, 5 December 1866 (Howell Collection).

² *Times*, 4 December 1866.

³ *Bee-Hive*, 26 May 1866.

⁴ *Bee-Hive*, 8 December 1866.

in the winter of 1865-6, these new shares had failed to maintain their popularity. Only four unions, and few individuals, had subscribed for them in the six months that had passed since the list of 23 unions was published in April. During the same period even fewer of the original shares had been taken, and no unions had subscribed for these after the Yorkshire Glass Bottle Makers took 100 in the first week of March. The shareholders' list also throws an interesting light on the claim, first put forward in August 1866, and repeated in much the same words at intervals during the following year, that the individual shareholders in the *Bee-Hive* were "above 3,000 in number, besides upwards of 100 trade societies". In October 1866, the total of individual shareholders was little more than 1,300, while trade societies holding shares numbered 82.¹

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1866, as Hartwell remarked in his "Retrospect of the Year", had been crowded with important events. 1867 was to prove still more eventful. This was the year in which the urban workers were enfranchised, while at the same time their unions faced the most serious threat to their existence since the days of the Combination Acts. It was also the year in which the Junta, organising the defence of the new type of unionism, scored their really decisive victory over Potter and his supporters.

At the beginning of 1867 the *Bee-Hive*, reflecting as usual the main preoccupations of the labour leaders, was still giving the Reform movement pride of place in its columns, stressing particularly the growing trade union participation in the movement, and earning a word of approval from Beesly for deciding, after some hesitation, to support the Reform League's own Trades Reform demonstration.² The decision to hold this demonstration had really been forced upon the Reform League Executive, by the LWMA's success in December. In spite of the League's close connection with the trade union movement, its leaders had hesitated to call on the unions themselves to demonstrate – largely through uncertainty about the prospects of success, and the quite natural view that a poorly-attended demonstration would do only harm to their cause. They had thus found

¹ No shares were ever taken by the ASE, the ASCJ, or the Ironfounders; but the Operative Bricklayers had taken 40 in May 1862. The most important of the other shareholding unions was the Operative Stonemasons' Society (100 shares in March 1864). 29 out of the 82 were either local carpenters' societies or lodges of the GUC.

² *Bee-Hive*, 9 February 1867.

themselves once more forestalled by Potter and Hartwell.¹ Immediately after the LWMA demonstration, they began making their own arrangements; and the Trades Council passed a strongly-worded resolution, moved by Allan and supported by Applegarth and Coulson, calling on all trade unionists to “aid the forthcoming demonstration under the auspices of the League”.² The demonstration took place on 11 February. The procession, marching with bands and banners from Trafalgar Square to the Islington Agricultural Hall, was conceded by the *Bee-Hive* in its next issue to have been “little if any inferior in numbers” to the procession of 3 December. With the LWMA co-operating, and the amalgamated societies this time sending official contingents, it was an even more impressive affirmation of trade union feeling.

This feeling had in fact been considerably strengthened by the time the demonstration took place. The *Hornby v. Close* decision of 16 January, which placed trade union funds at the mercy of defaulting officials, served to re-emphasise the need for trade union political action. This was the burden of *Bee-Hive* articles on the case written by Frederic Harrison, Dunning and Beesly in successive issues. But attention soon became concentrated on the Royal Commission, set up as a result of the “outrages” to consider the whole question of the status of trade unions; and for the next few months the *Bee-Hive* treated the Commission’s proceedings as a news-item of equal importance to that of the Reform movement.

At the end of January the LWMA called a national Trade Union Conference for 5 March, to consider “The Law and Trade Unions”; and in February the defence of trade unions before the Royal Commission was added to the agenda. This was the origin of the famous St. Martin’s Hall Conference, which remained in session for four days under Potter’s chairmanship, with Hartwell acting as secretary. Attended by representatives from 11 Trades Councils, 73 London unions, and 30 provincial unions, it was justly described in the *Bee-Hive* as “one of the most numerous and influential conferences ever known in the annals of trade unionism”. Most of the provincial leaders were present; but there were no representatives from the London Trades Council or the amalgamated societies. The Junta had founded in January the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, consisting of representatives from the Engineers, Bricklayers, Iron-

¹ There has often been confusion about the responsibility for the two demonstrations. For instance, S. Maccoby, following a misleading account in Irving’s *Annals of Our Time*, credits both demonstrations to the Reform League, and so misses the point of the LWMA’s initiative and its effect on the League (*English Radicalism, 1853-1886, 1938*, pp. 92-94).

² LTC Minutes, 19 December 1866.

founders and Amalgamated Carpenters, together with Odger, and through this organisation they hoped to keep the presentation of the trade union case securely in their own hands.¹ This time they acted more quickly than the LWMA, and their deputation on the implications of the *Hornby v. Close* decision was received by the Home Secretary just over a week before the corresponding deputation from the Association. To the Junta's annoyance, the decision to set up a Royal Commission was officially announced during that week; and the LWMA deputation took the opportunity of pressing for the inclusion of working-class representatives on the Commission. On being told that this was impossible, they expressed their approval of the nomination of Frederic Harrison, as a man who enjoyed the confidence of all sections of the trade union movement.² To this the Junta replied with the quite unjustified assertion that if it had been left to them, acting either through the Trades Council or through the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, one or more working men, besides Harrison, might have been included.³ They then denounced the St. Martin's Hall Conference as "premature", and called by "self-appointed nobodies" whose Association was no more than "a myth".⁴ It was on these grounds – although the resolution embodying the decision was more temperately worded – that the Trades Council refused to be represented at the Conference.

When the delegates assembled, it was the Junta, not the LWMA, who were criticised by the provincial leaders for the division of forces in London. Even if the *Bee-Hive* account of the Conference is regarded as likely to be biased, this view comes out equally clearly in the report authorised for publication by the committee which remained in being after the Conference dispersed.⁵ It was further demonstrated at a meeting between twenty-five of the provincial delegates and members of the Trades Council, held on the evening of the third day of the Conference. At this meeting Applegarth, Odger, Allan and Coulson explained their reasons for refusing to co-operate, while Daniel Guile, although he had withdrawn from the LWMA and agreed with his Executive Committee's decision not to send a delegate, apparently made some attempt to act as peacemaker. Among the provincial delegates, the attitude of Alexander Macdonald, the Mineworkers'

¹ The first meeting was held on 28 January. On 1 March the secretary of the Vellum Binders' Society accepted an invitation to become a permanent member (Minutes of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, in the Webb Collection, British Library of Political and Economic Science).

² *Bee-Hive*, 9 February 1867.

³ *Bee-Hive*, 9 March 1867.

⁴ *Bee-Hive*, 2 and 9 March 1867.

⁵ Copies of this report are in the Howell Collection and the Burns Collection (TUC Library).

president, appears to have been fairly typical: "He did not care who convened the Conference, as long as all trade unionists joined in action." John Kane of the Ironworkers was reported to have said that they had "pretty well had their fill of criminations and recriminations His object in coming was to induce the Trades Council to join them." On the following afternoon eight of the provincial delegates attended a meeting of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, at which they were told that the Junta would be prepared to co-operate with the Conference committee on two conditions – first, that they supported Edmund Neate's Associations of Workmen Bill, aimed at protecting the funds of unions whose rules were deposited with the Registrar of Friendly Societies; and second, that Potter was removed from the committee.¹ Neither demand was accepted.

The Junta's attitude to the Conference, and their criticisms of Hartwell himself and other members of the LWMA as non-unionists,² produced from Hartwell some of his bitterest denunciations of "the four Marplots of the Trades Council" – "The artful (D)Odger Mr. Odger, the plausible and Jesuitical secretary of the Council, Mr. Applegarth, the conceited, priggish secretary of the ASCJ, Mr. Allan, full-bodied but empty-headed, Mr. Coulson, stolid and obstinate" and so on.³ Wrapped up in this was the quite genuine criticism that the Junta were mainly concerned with their own interests, not those of "the trades at large". This was clearly the view of such men as Macdonald and Kane, and for a brief space, Potter's support among the provincial unions seemed to be assured. But the attempt to follow up the proceedings of the St. Martin's Hall Conference ended in something very near fiasco. At first sight, the committee set up by the Conference to "watch over" the proceedings of the Royal Commission appeared a strong and representative one. It included Macdonald, Kane, John Proudfoot of the Glasgow Trades Council, and four other provincial leaders, together with Potter, Leicester and Connolly. After the first week, Proudfoot and Macdonald remained in London to form a sub-committee with the three London representatives, while the other members were recalled whenever a full committee meeting was deemed necessary. Connolly was allowed to be present on behalf of the committee at the examination of witnesses, and to send reports on proceedings to the *Bee-Hive*. But in June

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 9 March 1867; *Morning Advertiser*, 9 March 1867; Minutes of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades (Webb Collection).

² Hartwell had followed the normal practice, and left the London Society of Compositors on being promoted foreman-printer. But he claimed that he had always remained on good terms with the Society, and had never "taken on" a non-Society man.

³ *Bee-Hive*, 16 March 1867.

Connolly criticised J. A. Roebuck, who was one of the Commissioners, at a meeting called by the LWMA,; and he was promptly excluded from future sittings of the Commission.¹

It was then that the ineffectiveness of the committee became apparent. It proved difficult to find a time when all the members could be in London together, there were divisions of opinion among the members, and two meetings of delegates from the London unions represented at the Conference only complicated matters. A deputation to the Commission failed to secure Connolly's recall, but received an assurance of the Commissioners' readiness "to receive any other person" in his place. When the Commissioners decided early in August to adjourn until November, it was still uncertain whether Connolly was to be replaced. The committee, after agreeing that this was a convenient time to issue a further report and a balance sheet, also decided to adjourn. The report included much sensible advice on the need to ensure that the next parliament included men who understood and sympathised with the trade union movement; and the section which summarised the evidence so far given before the Commission, although showing occasional bias – for instance, Potter "gave very lucid evidence on all points", while much of Applegarth's evidence on friendly benefits was "not strictly germane to the purpose for which the Commission was appointed" – was sufficiently well done to make it a useful document for distribution among trade union members.² But the adjournment really marked the end of the committee, and no further meetings were reported.

The failure of the committee was not redeemed by those of its members who gave evidence. Potter himself, in spite of the comments in the committee's report, was unimpressive. Although he was questioned on the LWMA and on his secretaryship of the Building Trades Conference, the greater part of his examination naturally dealt with the affairs of his own union, and there was nothing he could say that would make the Progressive Carpenters seem anything more than a very small and unimportant body. On wider questions of trade union policy, Potter generalised rather ineffectually; and much of his evidence reads like that of a man who was temporizing rather than giving forthright answers. The secretaries of some of the old-fashioned unions, including Robert Last of the GUC, were still more inadequate.

Against all this, the activities of the Junta showed up in vivid contrast. While Connolly was excluded by the Commissioners, Applegarth, representing the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, was

¹ Bee-Hive, 29 June and 6 July 1867.

² A copy of this report – apparently the only one that has survived – is in the Burns Collection.

allowed to remain. The Commission eventually became a personal triumph for Applegarth, who, answering in all 633 questions as a witness, did more than any other man to impress upon the Commissioners the merits of the amalgamated societies.¹ Their extensive benefit provision, and the comparative moderation of their trade policies, were of course the strongest arguments he could use; and, helped by leading questions from Harrison and Thomas Hughes, he naturally made the most of these arguments. But his attitude was very different from Potter's, and there was nothing guarded about his answers. He insisted that the ASCJ was primarily a trade and not a benefit society, made no secret of the fact that he would support strikes whenever he considered them justified, and vigorously defended the practice of peaceful picketing. In fact, the manner in which he gave his evidence impressed the Commissioners, and the interested public, quite as much as did the answers to any particular questions. This also applied to Allan, while even the more rugged Coulson showed up well. Even for those who only read the evidence, there could be no doubt that these men were the responsible officials of well-run national societies, business-like and confident, with every detail of organisation and policy at their finger-tips, and with no shady secrets to hide. Meanwhile, the Conference of Amalgamated Trades had set out to prepare a more comprehensive bill than that proposed by Neate. In the autumn of 1867 their Trade Union Bill – originally drafted by Henry Crompton, and amended after discussions in which Beesly, Harrison and J. M. Ludlow also took part – was circulated to the press and the London unions.²

This was the real turning-point in the Junta's struggle against Potter and his supporters. In November the Mineworkers, at their half-yearly conference, refused to pay the levy of $\frac{1}{4}$ d a head towards the expenses of the St. Martin's Hall Conference and its committee.³ Seven months later, at the Manchester Trades Union Congress of June 1868, the policy of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades was endorsed with a vote of confidence moved by John Kane.⁴ This was only the beginning of an acceptance of the Junta's leadership by the provincial unions, and there was to be no real co-operation between

¹ Mr. Applegarth's Evidence Before the Royal Commission, published by the ASCJ, ran to 75 closely-printed pages.

² Minutes of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades (Webb Collection).

³ Bee-Hive, 23 November 1867. Whether Macdonald would have agreed with this decision is not clear, since he was in the United States at the time.

⁴ Bee-Hive, 6 June 1868; A. E. Musson, *The Congress of 1868*, 1955, pp. 36-37. Potter was present as a delegate from the LWMA – combining this function with that of "special reporter" for the Bee-Hive – but there is no evidence that he spoke on Kane's motion.

them for another three years; but there had clearly been a decided change of opinion since the spring and early summer of 1867. It was during this same period, from mid-1867 to mid-1868, that the *Bee-Hive* suffered its most serious loss of support. Although Potter's fortunes were so closely identified with those of the *Bee-Hive*, his loss of prestige did not necessarily entail a corresponding drop in the paper's popularity; but it was no doubt one of the factors that contributed to the decline. Moreover, this came at a time when the *Bee-Hive's* difficulties would in any event have been increased. After the passing of the Reform Act, the news provided no sensational items comparable to the industrial disputes of 1865 and the Reform meetings of 1866-7. Still more important was the minor slump which followed the financial crisis of 1866, and which lasted for more than two years as a temporary setback to the growth of national prosperity.

The effects of this economic depression had already been pointed out by Potter at the half-yearly shareholders' meeting in May 1867. The profit on the half-year, reported Potter, was only 10/-. But even this, he felt, was an achievement for which some credit was due to the *Bee-Hive's* conductors, in view of "the great depression in trade, and the general distress which has prevailed amongst the working classes during the winter – the one tending to decrease the amount received from advertisements, and rendering them very difficult to obtain, the other tending to limit the circulation of the *Bee-Hive*". Troup and Connolly, among others, "urged the taking up of shares", Troup insisting that "more capital was absolutely necessary". Connolly, referring to one debt of £ 200 which it was important to "clear away", persuaded twenty-five of those present to take up additional shares on the spot; and Potter agreed to send a circular to absent shareholders who might follow this example.¹ These renewed efforts were at least evidence of a determination to survive, which was not matched by the conductors of the *Commonwealth*. This paper was closed down in July 1867; and the *Bee-Hive's* supporters rejoiced. But the *Commonwealth*, suffering from divided counsels and a succession of amateur editors, had never become established as a really serious rival. The most obvious result of its closure was the reappearance in the *Bee-Hive* of weekly reports from the International.

It was some time before the *Bee-Hive's* increasing difficulties were reflected in its general contents. Trade union news was still plentiful, and the Reform agitation of course reached its climax in the summer of 1867. Both the Reform League and the LWMA had redoubled their

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 25 May 1867.

activities while the Reform question was before the House, both bodies finding Trafalgar Square meetings particularly effective. The rivalry between League and Association still at times came to the surface – once at least on a very inconvenient occasion. In April both sent deputations to Gladstone, the LWMA, as so often happened, preceding their rivals by a few days. The League's deputation included Hartwell and Connolly, as proof of the broad basis of the organisation; and in Gladstone's presence Cremer began a very undignified squabble with these two about the status of the LWMA – a squabble which called on all Beales's resources of tact before the proper business of the deputation could again proceed.¹ However, in spite of such incidents, it was the almost complete unanimity of their views on Reform, rather than the rivalry between them, that was most striking during this period.

Both League and Association constantly reiterated that their long-term objectives were manhood suffrage and the ballot; but both made it clear that in the meantime they would welcome what an LWMA resolution of the previous year had described as "any honest comprehensive measure of Reform". Disraeli's first moves in February met with little but derision from the Reformers. The more comprehensive measure introduced on 18 March still satisfied very few of them, limited as it was by its "safeguards" and "fancy franchises". But in the increased agitation which these moves stirred up, the demands for further concessions were really comparatively moderate. On 2 March Hartwell was declaring, with editorial assurance: "We must have at least household suffrage, a lodger franchise, and the ballot" – as "the least instalment the people are now prepared to take". In the same week, Potter had told an LWMA meeting that "with household suffrage and a lodger franchise, he would be prepared to hold his peace for some time". Very similar views were being expressed by the leaders of the Reform League. What in fact was made quite clear during this time was that as long as the franchise was extended to most of the urban working men, even without the ballot, the sting would be taken out of the agitation. It was also clear that anything less might well intensify the agitation still further.

This attitude of the League and the LWMA made it all the easier to co-operate with John Bright, in his campaign for household suffrage, and with the National Reform Union – which, as an organisation supported primarily by middle-class Radicals, had always made household suffrage the basis of its programme. When the Union, which had previously operated only in the northern industrial areas, decided

¹ Bee-Hive, 6 April 1867; Commonwealth, 6 April 1867.

to begin holding meetings in London, rank-and-file members of both League and Association showed signs of wishing to protest; but there was no official opposition from either body. Hartwell, in fact, argued that there was “scope for the Union” in London in “endeavouring to rouse the middle class”, and Potter appeared on the platform at their second London meeting.¹ Potter’s activities at this time ranged well beyond his regular speeches at LWMA meetings. The reputation he still enjoyed as a trade union leader gave him added status as a working-class Reformer; and his speeches in the provinces, at League meetings, at Reform Union meetings, and at meetings organised by purely local bodies, even occasionally meetings where he appeared alongside Bright, were well publicised in the local and national press. Hartwell, meanwhile, was doing his best to show the extent and the fervour of the nation-wide movement. As the Bill was transformed by one Radical amendment after another, he greeted each amendment as a concession to the demands of the Reform associations. When Disraeli accepted Hodgkinson’s amendment – which gave the vote to compound householders as well as personal ratepayers – Hartwell declared: “The government has quailed before the new agitation.” He then bracketed the LWMA with the Reform League and the Reform Union as the bodies responsible for this achievement.²

The Bill finally became an Act of Parliament in August. Household suffrage and a restricted lodger franchise in the boroughs, with reduced qualifications in the counties, left the Reform League and the LWMA still a long way from their stated goal of manhood suffrage and the ballot. But they had been granted the concessions that really mattered to the majority of their members; and their sense of achievement was heightened by the fact that the Bill in its original form had promised so much less. Few Reformers were prepared to give any credit to Disraeli – although, in a confused parliamentary situation which enabled him to dominate the proceedings, he had carried his party with him in accepting amendments which turned the Bill into a Radical measure. Much has been written about Disraeli’s motives in allowing the Bill to be transformed in this way. What is certain is that he had become convinced, before the opening of Parliament in February, that the time had come for a “comprehensive solution”; and for this decision the change in public opinion had been mainly responsible. It was no longer possible to argue, as many journalists and politicians had in 1866, that the vast majority of working men showed no desire for the franchise. While the Bill was before the

¹ Bee-Hive, 18 May and 1 June 1867.

² Bee-Hive, 25 May 1867.

House, Disraeli was no doubt mainly concerned with “dishing the Whigs” by ensuring that a Conservative Bill should go through, almost regardless of the number of Radical amendments it might seem expedient to accept. But he could not have been uninfluenced by the extent and the nature of the renewed agitation which flared up during those weeks. In fact, when he had conceded household suffrage by accepting Hodgkinson’s amendment, he pointed out to Gathorne Hardy that this step would “destroy the present agitation”.¹

In this agitation, as in the earlier development of the movement, the LWMA had played a useful part. But Hartwell was claiming far too much when he ranked the Association with the Reform League and the Reform Union on a basis of equality. While Beales’s assertion – “The Reform League are the real authors of the Bill”² – was also of course an exaggerated claim, there can be no doubt that the League, with its branches numbering by this time 107 in London and 337 in the provinces, and its vastly superior resources, had played a much greater part at all stages than had the LWMA with its 600 members.³ In particular, it was the Reform League which had proved to the general public that working men could put forward reasoned demands in a disciplined and orderly way, while at the same time showing a determination which suggested (and the Hyde Park railings were the symbol of this) that continued frustration might in time lead to more drastic action. Nevertheless, the LWMA had helped to swell the agitation in London; and on one point its members had every reason to congratulate themselves. In 1867, it was generally recognised that the participation of organised labour had greatly increased the weight of the agitation. The Reform League had certainly aimed from the beginning at gaining trade union support; but it was the LWMA that took the initiative in bringing official representatives of the unions on to the streets to demonstrate, and stimulated the League to follow suit.

As soon as the Act was passed, the LWMA set out to organise a Reform Fete and Banquet – yet again forestalling the Reform League – and then took up in earnest the demand for working-class Members of Parliament. This question had first been raised by Hartwell at a meeting of the Association in April 1866; and it was on Hartwell’s motion that the Association decided in October 1867 to advocate “a direct representation of the Labour interest by the return of working men to Parliament”.⁴ On 16 November the “Address to the People

¹ W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, 1929 edn., Vol. II, p. 274.

² *Times*, 30 May 1867.

³ This was the highest recorded figure for LWMA membership (Bee-Hive, 9 March 1867; Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, Qu. 307).

⁴ Bee-Hive, 14 and 21 April 1866, and 12 October 1867.

of England” – including the “Platform” of the LWMA – was published in the *Bee-Hive*. The “Platform”, as G. D. H. Cole has pointed out, went no further than “what was left unachieved of the old Radical programme, plus certain specific working-class demands”.¹ The “Address” argued that on labour questions only working men, “practically acquainted with the habits, feelings and wants of the working classes”, could put effectively the working-class point of view. But they would not be “class representatives”, any more than other M.P.’s – they would “represent all classes of the electors . . . not those of one particular interest”. There was no suggestion that these men would form a new party. They were in fact to be independent Radicals, differing very little (except for their special knowledge) from those middle-class Radicals already in the House.

The aims of the new movement were thus essentially moderate; but the LWMA could hardly have aimed higher with any hope of immediate success. It seems likely that Hartwell would have preferred a more forthright appeal to the class-conscious working man. He attempted this on his own behalf in the following year, when he tried to stand for Stoke-on-Trent, against Liberal opposition, as an “Independent Working Men’s Candidate”; and his failure reinforced the arguments that Potter must have used when the LWMA’s policy was being hammered out. Although they had remained closely in step during the Reform agitation, the occasional differences of emphasis had always shown Potter more ready to be satisfied with limited concessions. Similarly, from the mass of reports and statements on labour representation which now appeared, Potter seems to have been more anxious than Hartwell to reassure middle-class sympathisers that working men in Parliament would not concern themselves solely with working-class interests. However, there were at this stage only the slightest hints of serious disagreement between them, and the *Bee-Hive* was soon fully launched into its new campaign. During the last few weeks of 1867, and well on into 1868, the direct representation of labour was the most prominent item of discussion in its columns, and the cause most strongly advocated in Hartwell’s editorials.

Judged by its industrial and political news and comment, the *Bee-Hive* was still maintaining a high standard as a working-class organ; but there were a number of indications that its position was deteriorating. Despite urgent appeals to trade unionists for increased support, no further instances were reported of unions subscribing for shares. An editorial on 5 October had complained that the *Bee-Hive* now had “but scant circulation” in the mining areas, and as the months

¹ British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914, 1941, p. 43.

went by contributions from provincial unions appeared much less frequently. The annual general meeting was given less space than any previous meeting of shareholders, and no details of the report and financial statement were published – which, in view of the publicity always given to items which demonstrated “the progress of the *Bee-Hive*”, suggests very strongly that there was nothing encouraging in whatever was reported to the shareholders.¹ At the beginning of 1868 it was announced that the *Bee-Hive* was to become more of “a family newspaper”, with the inclusion of “such lighter matter as will please the females”. Space was found for some “lighter matter”, the tone of the editorials became somewhat quieter, and the more lurid items of general news were given less prominence. But this does not seem to have improved the circulation. Potter’s next report to the shareholders showed that the *Bee-Hive*’s income from both sales and advertisements was decreasing, and that drastic action was needed to keep the paper in existence.

Bankruptcy was averted by the intervention of Daniel Pratt, a Liberal and Nonconformist publisher who had already assisted the *Bee-Hive* in its earlier struggles. Pratt – who was part-proprietor of the *Christian World*, one of the best-established Nonconformist newspapers, and also publisher of several fairly influential journals – had taken 100 shares at the beginning of 1863, and had followed this up with a loan of £ 100.² He now became the central figure in a process of reorganisation which was eventually to turn the *Bee-Hive* into a quite different paper. It also opened a new phase in Potter’s relations with the Junta.

(To be continued in the next issue)

¹ *Bee-Hive*, 21 December 1867.

² At the same time, office accommodation was provided at 10 Bolt Court, Fleet Street – a building which belonged to Pratt, and the one in which his own offices were situated. For details of Pratt’s loan, see *Bee-Hive*, 10 June 1865; *Miner and Workman’s Advocate*, 15 July 1865; and *Workman’s Advocate*, 9 September 1865.