

SOCIALIST COMMENT

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ONE PENNY

Feathers Fly in N.Z. "Workers' Paradise"

In view of the boasts and claims of the Labour Politicians that since the Labour Party has been in power, legislation has been brought down placing N.Z. second to none in living standards and social security for its working class, it would seem base ingratitude, is the cause of the industrial upheavals that have occurred, particularly since the end of 1944.

The Waterside Workers' Union—problem child of the Labour Government—has been the object of much abuse, scandal, scorn and dire threats. Labour cabinet ministers and Government representatives overseas have condemned this section of the N.Z. working class.

At the launching of N.Z. Shipping Company's new ship, M.V. Haparangi, Mr. Jordon, High Commissioner for N.Z., after complimenting the Company on their courage in commissioning the ship, "suddenly started the guests by striking the table before him and crying: 'What is the good of building these fine food ships—what is the use of manning them and sailing them if they are going to idle away their time in distant ports lacking cargoes because of local industrial disputes.'" (Evening Post, Wellington, 3/3/47).

Prior to the elections, the Waterside Workers' Union spent large sums of money in demonstrations for the return of the Labour Government. They gave thousands of pounds to the Labour Party's election fighting fund. After the election, which Labour won by the "skin of its teeth," the wharves' action in defying and "embarrassing their own Government" seems stupid and illogical. The ways of workers with such meagre knowledge of their position in society are certainly strange, and we must look a little further for the cause of such conduct.

Since the Labour Party attained power in 1935, nominal wages have risen but the living standard has fallen. In the attempt to implement their programme of reforms the Government has met with many obstacles. Early in their term they were able to fob off the impatient workers with the excuse that the previous Government had left such a mess that it would be some time before they could move. So the admonition "don't embarrass the Labour Government" served them well until it became an object of derision. The war soon provided another in "crush the Nazi monster." When this became threadbare "stabilisation" took its place. By voting themselves a substantial rise in pay the politicians themselves took the sting out of this one. "Winning the Peace" had a short life, followed by "food for our starving kith and kin in the Old Country." This slogan has

served the Government well in defending the interests of the ship-owners in their battle with the watersiders. The so-called high wages earned by this group of workers, the amenities and benefits bestowed upon them by the waterfront Control Commission have been much publicised and used in an effort to discredit them in the eyes of the workers generally, and to show them to be greedy and indifferent to the sufferings of others. In an effort to force the Watersiders back to "normal" working hours (8 a.m. to 9 p.m.) the "Commission" was suspended. This suspension left the Watersiders entirely unmoved and not a little puzzled as to the importance and value of the benefits and amenities bestowed.

The "Commission," like the Railways Industrial Tribunal and other set-ups interposed between the Master and the men in bargaining for the price and condition of sale of the workers' labouring power, has served the master well. The procrastination of such bodies in bringing down decisions which, in any case are rarely acceptable to workers, has sorely tried their patience, forcing them to strike.

There is the position in which the Waterside Workers found themselves: During the war Watersiders made many concessions in their working conditions, etc., while suffering wage deductions in the form of wage tax and income tax (an average of 23%). Many protests were made against

these deductions, but pleas by Union and Government Officials not to impede the war effort were heeded. Promises were made of a new order on the successful conclusion of the war. The waterside workers think it is about time an instalment of the "New Order" was forthcoming.

Four modest demands were put forward:—1. "That each man registered, etc., shall be guaranteed work in each day, Monday to Saturday inclusive, to the value of not less than 14/-, or, failing the provision of such work, shall be paid that sum. 2. Wage increases to restore the position as laid down by the Court of Arbitration whereby waterside workers receive 25% above the hourly rate of unskilled workers. 3. Immediate improvements in accommodation. (This has been an outstanding grievance for many years and has been pressed continuously for the past six years). 4. Abolition of Saturday engagements.

Although it was agreed by the Ministers and the Executive Committee of the N.Z. Federation of Labour, that these were responsible demands, they claimed that the Watersiders' action in engaging in an over-time strike was wrong, and that they should place the dispute in their (The Federation's) hands and return to "normal" hours of work. It could be settled by negotiation. Previous experience in negotiation made the Watersiders decide to stick their toes in and buck the "Workers' Govern-

Continued on Page 2.

KISS AND TELL

We reproduce, in full, the following news item which appeared in "The Guardian," official organ of the Australian Communist Party, Victorian division, of January 10th, 1947, on page 4, col. 3. Emphasis is "The Guardian's."

Pope Meets Communists.

"The Pope recently agreed to give audience to Communists before leaving his holiday villa at Castel Gandolfo.

The Catholic people of this ancient village had elected a left-wing council, pledged to the breaking up of the big estates among the poor farmers. The new town fathers were led by the Communist shoemaker, Mario di Bernardino.

Although angry at their election, the Pope agreed to receive them for the traditional farewell ceremony. However, he received them in the cobbled courtyard of the villa instead of the marble-floored rooms inside where the ceremony was usually held.

He asked them about the crops, not about politics.

According to custom the Pope was presented with wine, fruit and fish, and Mario di Bernardino knelt and kissed the Pope's ring.

The townspeople, while strongly catholic, will have nothing to do with the Pope's anti-communist propaganda. Di Bernardino, while not attacking the Pope himself, has accused Vatican functionaries around the Pope of wanting to keep political power from the people."

Long comment on our part would only spoil this superb piece. We can only suggest that the local "comrades" immediately send a telegram to "the communist shoemaker" suggesting that the "Communist" Party of Italy immediately put forward the demand that the Pope should receive them in proper "marble floored rooms" instead of a mere "cobbled courtyard." After all, it IS a bit awkward, having to kneel on a cobbled floor and kiss the ring—especially when it's raining.

—Stan.

Feathers Fly in N.Z. Workers' Paradise

(Continued from Page 1)

ment" AND the Executive Committee of the N.Z. Federation of Labour, and a battle ensued which cost the Trade Union Movement of N.Z. a large sum of money.

Never before has the position of the Government, as the executive of the Capitalist class, been made so clear as in this instance. The workers' unique position for the shipowners' Relieved of the expense and inconvenience of a struggle with a powerful Union such as the Watersiders' Workers, What fun for them to see their agents with the valuable aid of the Executive Committee of the N.Z. Federation of Labour and Trade Union Funds endeavouring to batter their natural enemy into submission.

The outcome of this struggle was hailed by the Officials of the Union as a great victory. In view of the opposition it cost was. However, No. 1 of the demands suffered a considerable amount of whitening. Like the previous guaranteed wage it remains completely surrounded by loopholes. It reads, "Guaranteed daily and weekly minimum payments—Unionists classified A class, in accordance with conditions prescribed by the Commission, and registered under bureau or other system, established or to be established, and who comply with the bureau rules and conditions laid down by the Commission, shall at the ports of Auckland, Wellington, Lyttelton, etc. . . . Unionists shall be guaranteed each week a minimum to the value of 85, or falling provision of the work, shall have wages made to that sum."

The value of the loopholes to the master is reflected in the actual payouts for the previous guaranteed wage (£3/6-) at three ports, Auckland, Wellington and Lyttelton. From 1941 to March 1946 these totalled £2187 (Report of Waterfront Control Commission 1945, Page 9). Although the original demand did not amount to anything like this week it was entirely devoid of loopholes of any kind. The Masters' representatives, having some idea of the tendencies of Capitalist evident in this, a great deal of slack time in the waterfront in the near future. Had the original demand been conceded it would have meant considerable encroachment upon the Shipowners' profits. Hence the fierce opposition shown to this demand. In comparison there was NO demand to the other three demands.

The claim for a wage rate was left in abeyance until the application for general rise of £1 per week by the Federation of Labour has been dealt with by the Court of Arbitration. Watersiders would receive a rise accordingly. How far into the distant future this will go there is no indication at the time of writing. If judges' private experience of courts and tribunals it will certainly be "the distant future."

The Labour Ministers' actions and attitude toward the watersiders in the various raised may indignation and resentment on the watersiders.

The experience of other workers in similar circumstances evidently has

not yet taught them that the Labour Government will act in the same manner as any other Capitalist Government when circumstances warrant it. Having only a mandate to administer Capitalism, this is what they will do whether the workers like it or not.

The problems of the waterside workers are the same as those of all workers. Their solution is the same. It lies in an intelligent political movement to replace private ownership in the means of living by common ownership and democratic control. Give this your attention, fellow workers, and help the Companion Socialist Parties of the world to bring it about.

—Ron. S.P.N.Z.

CUTTINGS & COMMENTS

WASHDAY

A censure motion in Parliament usually brings to light plenty of dirty linen by both sides, but the latest one was no exception. Mr. Menzies, while shedding some crocodile tears over the "political hand-outs" by the Labor Government, was particularly careful not to claim that the mere fact of a man taking part in politics disqualified him from appointments—after all when the Liberals get back to power they will want to hand out a few plums. Mr. Chifley fell back on the "saucy for the goose" adage, by reminding those who had forgotten that the "present Chief Justice to the High Court (Sir John Latham) was previously engaged for some time in active politics" and that "The present Acting Chief Justice of the Arbitration Court (Judge Drake-Brockman) was a campaign director for the Conservatives." (Herald, 30/2/47)

The next day, Mr. Holt (Lab.) made another interesting statement: "The Menzies Government had appointed Mr. Chifley, then not a member of the House and a defeated politician, as Director of Labor. That had been a very good choice. Mr. Holt said that when he was Minister for Labor he appointed many men

TRUE ENOUGH

It is interesting to reflect that very often out-and-out reactionaries seem to have a better understanding of the working class society than so-called progressives. This, of course, is a generalisation, and only valid as such. The reasons for it are manifold: probably the main ones are the fact that these people intend to take deliberate advantage of political ignorance, while the "progressives" bid themselves that they are combatting it. These lines are prompted by a quote from a book just published, "Australia: The Challenge of Jobs," by J. G. Murray. Mr. Murray goes on to this say on Australian politics: "Between the Conservative (Capitalist) and Progressive (Labour) elements in the nation's politics there has been only a time-lag, for both are dominantly Liberal in their social philosophy. Hence Labour leaders evolve into Conservatives with the mellowing of years and Conservatives implement essentially Labour policies, while both compete with each other for popular support 'progressives' the extension of the powers of the State" (G. in "Argus" Book Section, 15/2/47).

BAD MEMORY

Mr. Clary is quite indignant at the charge that the A.C.T.U. is gone over to the "Communists." He stated that "the decisions of the recent conference of the A.C.T.U. were made by that body and it is disappointing that the decisions of the 1945 A.C.T.U. Congress." (Labor Call, 13/2/47).

Unfortunately, he "forgot" to mention that one of those 1945 decisions was a resolution, giving the Labor Government a "deadline" in 1946 by which the 40-hour week must be introduced. A flexible "deadline" we'd say! There has also been a lot of fuss by the press about Mr. Clary's position of being at the same time president of the ACTU and Victorian Minister for Labor. (He is also Presi-

"Socialism is: From each according to his powers, to each according to his needs. Equality is only proportionality; it exists in a true manner only when every person, in accordance with the laws of his bodily constitution written by Nature itself, produces according to his faculties and consumes according to his wants."

LOUIS BLANC.

dent of the Storemen & Packers and the Food Preservers' Unions.) How, asks the "Herald," can he "uphold the Constitution" and "foster strikes" at the same time?

Poor Clary! It must be a hard blow to him to see that his services to the capitalist class are not being appreciated. If the "Herald" only realised that Clary is worth his weight in gold to the bosses, but not worth id. to the workers, it would not attack him.

NO COMMENT . . . Mr. R. M. Egleston, Council in the basic wage case, the ACTU to Acting Chief Judge Drake-Brockman, in the Arbitration Court. "Embarrassment of some kind is inseparable from proceedings in this court." (Age, 25/2/47).

Continued on Page 3, third column

THE FORUM:

Why Prices Increase

For some years now, a sympathizer of the S.P.A. W. Daft, of Forecst, Tasmania, has issued, under the name of "Socialist," a "Monthly Bulletin" various roneed leaflets concerned with socialist propaganda. Comrade Daft is not a member of the Socialist Party, believing that the only means of useful work outside it. In general, the leaflets sent to us by him have been sound and we believe that, on the whole, he is a most reliable worker.

However, there are some differences between his policy and ours, and one of them—the question of wages and prices—is of general interest. In fairness to Comrade Daft, we ought to point out that, in a private letter, he informs us that his views "are not meant to be hard and fast," and perhaps his short article will help to bring about a discussion.

For reasons of space we cannot reproduce the whole of the roneed article on "The Basic Wage" on which our criticism is based, but we hope that the following is a fair summary of his views:—

1.—The 7/- increase does not cover the rise in prices, nor does the extra £1 a week, if granted, do so. "Commodities are not produced in a vacuum. The value of the goods which we wear have increased as much as 300 per cent." In spite of "price control" increases in prices were permitted by the Chifley Government immediately after the basic wage increase was announced. "Under the modern set-up of Capitalism a general rise in wages does, in the long run, bring about a rise in commodity prices. In earlier days of capitalism, and when the State had less control over economy and production, and when the capitalist class was not so highly organised in those days it was true to say that wage increases did not necessarily mean a rise in commodity prices." But today things are different.

2.—Daft then tries to answer the question put recently in these columns: "If the capitalist class can offset a wage increase by increasing prices of commodities, why do they not oppose wage increases? The question has several answers. Firstly, the Capitalist class on a matter of principle and also on a matter of discipline oppose every reform demanded by the workers. Secondly, a general wage increase tends to temporarily upset the balance of trade and production." Daft then says that wage increases do not "bring real economic gains to the workers."

REPLY.—Point 1. Forgets that prices at present are under the control of a demand market. It is stated correctly, that the prices of certain commodities have increased up to 300%. But these increases have been made without any corresponding increase in the long run rises in wages bring about rises in prices, how to account for the growing increase in wages in respect in profits and increased capitalisation, if as he seems to assume, increases in wages are balanced by increases in prices?

As for the early days of capitalism we are prepared to admit that wage increases were more easily covered by increased mechanisation and reorganisation of industry, and that today it is increasingly hard to make any great increase in productivity without an increasingly greater increase of capitalisation and machinery.

In his second point, Daft seems to us to be begging the question. If the capitalist class could recoup wage increases by price increases, and if their resistance to wage increases is merely a question of "principle and discipline" their opposition would be half-hearted. Why, if they can increase prices at will with a wage rise, do they not increase them by much more? What is it that permits them to sell, say shoes, at price increased by 300% but not by 600%? The answer is obviously that they can only increase prices if the market will stand it, AND TO THE EXTENT THAT THE MARKET WILL STAND IT. Mr. Daft seems prone to minimize the influence of the law of supply and demand. True, this is only a short-term influence, but it does exist. Today, after a period of wholesale destruction such as the world has just passed through, this law asserts itself very strongly.

On the question of "price control" Surely it is obvious that "price control" can only function in the measure that supply and demand permit it to function. What else is the Black Market but a realisation of this fact? Even under complete State Capitalism as in Russia, or under a regimented wage economy, the Black Market flourishes, and all attempts to control, smash or abolish it have failed. Why? Because, with a shortage of goods on the one hand, and a banked up demand on the other hand, the law of supply and demand asserts itself in spite of all attempts to control it.

As far as the second part of this paragraph is concerned, we as socialists have never at any time put forward the proposition that wage increases under capitalism will bring long-term economic gains to the workers. Was it not Marx who formulated the "law of increasing misery"? Have we not always pointed out that the standard of living of workers are falling, and must continue to fall? The whole point about Trade Union action is that without it these standards of living would fall more rapidly.

Apart from any other factors, there is the situation created by the recent wholesale destruction of commodities and productive resources. So much money has been expended on the materials of war that this alone is sufficient to upset the financial equilibrium of the capitalist system. Since the interest on money lent comes out of the surplus value created by the workers and appropriated by those in control of the means of production, the interest there has been an increase in this indebtedness, this leaves those who derive their profit from industrial enterprise in a relatively worse position.

From this position we can extricate ourselves by two means—assuming the workers' share of the wealth remains the same—(a) a scaling down of interest charges—impossible at this stage—and (b) a reduction in the workers' share of the national wealth. This latter "solution" is being attempted at present, with consequent resistance on the part of the workers.

With each successive war this position becomes worse, the national debt creeping up ahead of the natural increase in productivity with the result that the worker's economic position deteriorates from year to year and the standard of living falls. (Lack of space prevents reference to other factors.)

However, having had to disagree with the approach of Comrade Daft to this question, we are glad to see that his conclusions are sound: "While the present system exists, the workers are forced to the position where they can take no other action than to demand more wages and improved working conditions; and in making these demands the workers are fully supported. But we urge that the working class to give serious consideration to the position they occupy in the present social economic set-up. If they do this, they will readily see that the wages of a few in a barrel, will have to be scrapped before they can gain real security and prosperity." —T.D.

CUTTINGS—Continued.

TEMPERANCE.

With regard to the article on "Beer and Socialism" in our Feb. issue, a friend draws our attention to a quote from Marx and Engels which puts the matter in a nutshell: "A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the proletariat, and other organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, TEMPERANCE FANATICS, hole-and-corner moralists of every imaginable kind." ("Communist Manifesto", Workers' Educational Bureau Edition, p.57, our capitals).

MARCH OF TIME.

We wonder how many of the Unionists who marched through Melbourne's streets on Labor Day realise that the first 8-hours' day was celebrated on April 18, 1847. The 40-hour week should be achieved during 1947 it will have taken ninety years to get it.

—H.H.

UNDER THE BEAR'S PAW

"The enthusiasm of the so-called left for Russia is generally in inverse proportion to their knowledge of the unions. The facts are there, within reach of everyone: Abolition of the right to strike, subordination of the workers to the bureaucrats of the employing (State) trusts, shackling of the worker to his place of work under the menace of imprisonment, progressive destruction of the children of the working-class from

universities and higher schools, now reserved for the children of the bureaucrats, restoration of the laws of inheritance and of life insurance which transfer the social privileges of the parents to their children and introduce inequality at the cradle.

To all this we must add the mass deportations — of soviet citizens, as well as those of the occupied countries — the law of hostages which makes a man's entire family responsible for his actions, the suppression of all political opposition, the elections which give the voters only the right to vote yes or no on a candidate named by superior authorities, the referendums which give 98% of yes votes, etc.

In a word — a state with a nationalized and centralized economy on which is superimposed a tyrannical and totalitarian autocracy."

(From "Le Liberaire" Paris, 8/11/46.)

WHAT A COMEDOWN!

"We are extremely sceptical of any Action the ACTU may decide to take. In the past this body has bungled almost every major industrial dispute that has been put into its hands." Thus we wrote last month. At the moment of going to press, that ACTU has (a) called off the May Day strike, (b) is fighting the engineers instead of the employers, and (c) is trying to convert the whole struggle for higher wages into a political fight against the Communists.

What it'll do next, we don't know, but we're sure it won't be anything sensible.

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OBJECT.—The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

The Socialist Parties of Australia and New Zealand hold:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the

monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. THE SOCIALIST PARTIES OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND therefore enter the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and to muster under their banner to the end that a speedy termination may be brought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

Those agreeing with the above principles and desiring enrolment apply to nearest address.

S.P.N.Z.

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