

SOCIALIST COMMENT

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PARTIES
OF
AUSTRALIA and
NEW ZEALAND

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ONE PENNY

Strikes Are No Honeymoon

The wave of strikes now sweeping Australia has led to the intensification of the anti-strike campaign. From the pulpit, through the radio, in the press, the professional head-fixers attempt to begot the issue. That, of course, is what they are paid for. Let us analyse some of the tricks of one section—the prostitutes.

"The Public Suffers."

Take the recent Gas Strike. We were told that the strikers had a duty to "the public," "the community," "the people." By striking, they were inflicting "untold hardship."

It is true that gas rationing, and later on the stoppage, imposed some inconveniences. These, of course, were magnified a thousandfold by the press—one would have thought that the majority of Australian workers would have died by eating cold salads instead of hot meals for a while. (With the temperature at nearly 100 throughout the strike, some people would argue that salads were the only sensible thing. However, that's beside the point.)

It is also true that capitalists not directly connected with the Gas Cos. were but little affected—you could buy electrical stoves at £30 a pop, and all the more expensive restaurants were open. Thus, one section of the working class caused some inconvenience to other sections of that class. But, may we ask—so what?

We live in a society where there is no "community" or "public." We have two opposing sections—exploiters and exploited, the former living on luxury on the unpaid labor of the latter. When the workers get more, the bosses get less and vice versa. The struggle, or war, between these classes we call the class struggle.

Strikes are manifestations of this struggle. Just as wars are not fought with kid gloves, so strikes, by their very nature, can't be conducted with sentiments. THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IS DIRECTLY PROPORTIONATE TO THE AMOUNT OF INCONVENIENCE THEY CAUSE. Capitalism today, a highly complicated system, depends on the exploitation of a working class who have to travel to work, have to eat. Transport services, gas, electricity, etc., are absolutely essential to get the workers to the job, and to allow them to accumulate sufficient energies for continued exploitation.

This, then, is the real reason why the press gets so absolutely hysterical when a strike in a "public utility" takes place.

Stunts.

In an attempt to whip up mass hysteria, it was suggested that the gas

strike would lead to the death of many hospital patients; no gas would be available to sterilise instruments.

This was played up for all it was worth. When the stunt was first put across, Adelaide had been without gas for 5 weeks. Yet no one had died. With the strike nearly over, it came out that "Melbourne's public hospitals have been virtually unaffected by the gas strike . . . all sterilisation is carried out with steam generated over furnaces." ("Age," 11/1/47.)

This stunt flopped. The "Herald" and the rest of the gutter press then attempted to inflate and glamorise a couple of women, who, with Liberal Party backing, had organised a "United Women's Movement." In spite of tons of publicity, these women, whose age, judging from their photos must average about 50, who came from the ranks of the capitalists (one drove up to a meeting in a Rolls Royce) only succeeded in making fools of themselves. Not even the gas companies took serious their

"TOO LONG HAVE THE WORKERS OF THIS WORLD WAITED FOR SOME MOSES TO LEAD THEM OUT OF BONDAGE; HE HAS NOT COME; HE NEVER WILL COME. I WOULD NOT LEAD YOU IF I COULD; FOR IF YOU COULD BE LED OUT, YOU COULD BE LED BACK AGAIN."

—Eugene V. Debs (1905).

grandiloquent promises to load coal and truck it to the works.

"Volunteers."

While coal in the works lasted, production was maintained by members of the staff—"volunteers." If these had not "volunteered," they would have lost their superannuation benefits. It seems as if these "white collar" workers—whose ranks are increasing with the decline of capitalism—will have to learn by bitter experience that they cannot isolate themselves from the class struggle. Every worker who takes part in a strike may be victimised—such threats can only be countered by increased solidarity.

On the subject of scabs, it was Jack London who wrote: "After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad, the vampire, he had some awful substance left with which he made a scab. A scab is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a waterlogged brain, a combination backbone of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts, he carries a tumour of rotten principles. When a scab comes down the street, men turn their backs and angels weep in Heaven, and the Devil shuts the gates of Hell to keep him out."

Increasing Discontent.

The A.C.T.U. by putting its full pressure on the Gas Workers, forced them back. Whatever the outcome now in the Arbitration Court of their claim for double time on Sunday, there seems no doubt that this strike is but the forerunner of bigger demands. The workers generally are getting fed up with the empty promises of the Labor Government. Having elected it in the belief that it would increase wages and reduce hours, they are now demanding some instalments of Chifley's "golden age." What they have yet to learn is the fact that, whether the Labor or Liberal Party is in power, they will have to fight for every concession on the industrial field.

But even if the 40-hour week and the £1 increase in the basic wage are achieved, the workers won't even have caught up with pre-war standards—let alone surpassed them.

Here the Socialist steps in, pointing out the absolute impossibility of achieving even a minimum of security and comfort under Capitalism. But it will require many more bitter

struggles till the workers realise that conscious political action for the overthrow of this insane system and the establishment of Socialism is the only way out.

In the meantime, undeterred by press propaganda, they must continue, by vigorous strike action and inter-union solidarity, to fight against any worsening of conditions.

—H

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POLITICS IN PALESTINE

(Concluded from Dec. and Jan. issues.)

As Capitalism has developed in Palestine, so have the contradictions in this social system become more patent, particularly in the contradiction of poverty amidst plenty. It was in the citrus industry that the effects of capitalism were first felt in 1928 when there was considerable unemployment for the Arabs employed in the orange groves of Haifa and Jaffa, there were also 5,000 Jews unemployed. By 1933 the position had become even further aggravated and labor census taken by Histadruth revealed that 75 per cent. of Jewish city workers and only 45 per cent. of the remote villages were in permanent employment. To overcome this state of affairs Histadruth advocated such anti-working class measures as bringing pressure to bear on Jewish capitalists to sack Arab workers, and offered to accept lower wages for the Jewish workers. In 1938 Arab workers of Jaffa were reported as starving, whilst Jewish unemployed workers seized the local council offices of Haifa, Petach-Tikva, Ramahon-Leviv, and other towns, and employment. The position eased during the war when Palestine became the supply base of the Allies in the East. Despite the restrictions of Zionism for the Jewish workers, the standard of living of the Jewish workers is no better than the workers in other capitalist countries.

CUTTINGS & COMMENTS

Urban workers earn about £7/8/- per month, and only a portion are in full time employment, and a 1937 census showed that 75 per cent. of the families live on 10/- or less. The position of the Arab workers is even worse.

The very conditions of capitalism are forcing the Arab and Jewish workers to realise they have a common enemy, and recent strikes show that they have united to gain concessions from the capitalists. On April 10th, 1946, postal employees went on strike for higher wages and better conditions, and on April 15th, 1946, 4,000 railway employees belonging to Jewish and Arab unions joined the postal workers' strike. A general strike of all government office personnel was called on April 16th. Arab and Jewish workers made similar demands on the Consolidated Refineries at Haifa and the Sacoay Vacuum Company's workers, Jewish and Arab, went on strike at Jerusalem, Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jaffa. All these strikes have been successful in gaining increases and better conditions.

Societs do that support the nationalistic aspirations of either the Jewish or Arab proletariat classes, but do support to the utmost the struggles of the working class in Palestine against capitalist exploitation, whether by Jewish, Arab, British, or any other group of capitalists. Our message to the fellow-workers of Palestine is that from the International Working class in September, 1865: "Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's work for a fair day's work!' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system!'" (Value, Price and Profit, p. 104.)

Undoubtedly the capitalist class in Palestine is the Promised Land as it promises much surplus value as the

source of raw materials of the Middle and Near East, but to the working class, Jew or Arab, it can only offer the misery and poverty that workers everywhere suffer. Socialism alone can make this world a Land of Promise for the workers of the world. —E. A. WATKINS.

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HEAVENLY MUSIC.

"Music is now being piped into dentists' waiting and operating rooms to soothe patients. It is 'sweet' music—pieces calculated to calm the patient—tempo staff piped into industrial plants to speed up work." (Argus, 14/12/46)

If we had the choice, we'd rather have a couple of teeth extracted once a year, than have the profits extracted from our hides day by day.

GENEROUS

"Some idea of the generosity with which State ministers of Parliament have treated themselves in their pensions scheme was given by a city secretary today. The scheme provides that any member leaving Parliament after 9 years' service shall receive the basic wage for the rest of his life... An ordinary member of the public would have to pay 19/5/- a week over nine years to get these benefits. Members of Parliament have fixed their contributions at 10/- a week." (Melb. Herald, 20/12/46)

This, of course, is equivalent to a wage increase. Wonder why they didn't approach the Arbitration Court?

GAGGED BOSSSES

Chairman of General Motors Corporation, Mr. Alfred P. Sloan: "Employers should be given the right to talk freely to employees." (Herald, 20/12/46)

"Excuse me, Charlie." "Yes, Mr. Sloan." "May I talk freely to you?" "By all means, Mr. Sloan." "You are sure you won't mind?" "Of course not, Mr. Sloan." "Well, then, Charlie, you're fired."

'NEW ORDER': FIRST INSTALLMENT

"Several hundred million Europeans, Americans and Asiatics, freed from the scourge of official war, have been looking in a somewhat bewildered manner up to heaven and exclaiming 'Peace, Peace, it's wonderful! but Peace, it's incredible!' In a mere twelve-month, the United Nations Organisation has failed to reach agreement on any basic issue... No settlement is really important territorial or economic problems."—Osmer White in 'Herald', 1/1/47

That's only the beginning—as the antagonisms between the Imperialist and Anglo-American Imperialism sharpen. Capitalism is driving us towards World War III—or should we say Atomic War I?

Work Harder—and

"On the eve of Britain's first great nationalisation step—the taking over of the coal mines—Trade Union Congress leaders today warned Britain's 20 million workers of the necessity for the hardest work of which they are capable. The vice-chairman of the T.U.C. (Mr. Charles Dukes) stated: 'Unless we get production to justify it, we can push pleasure to the point where its effects might cancel out the benefits for which we hope.'" (Herald, 1/1/47)

The Reward (Karl Marx's "Honors": "Barons: CHARLES DUKES, member of the Trades Union Council's General Council, since 1934." (Same paper, same date.)

Vain Appeal

"We cultivated the land and we starve. We stand at the looms and go in rags. We mine the coal and we freeze. Bloodless and pale, and with twisted bodies, our children walk the streets of our ruined towns. These are the results of 18 months of reconstruction."

From a petition of German workers to Mr. Atlee, G. in 'Socialist Appeal', London (mid-November, '46)

Terrorism

In view of the increasing terrorism by both sides in Palestine, it is interesting to recall the views of Frederick Engels, co-founder of scientific Socialism: "Terror, he wrote, means 'the domination of men who by themselves terrorised,' it consists of 'useless cruelties committed to give self-confidence to men who are themselves afraid.'"

P.M. Speaks

"We bow our heads in silence, go down on our knees and recite, with sweet rapture, Mr. Chifley's Xmas message."

"I ask trade unionists to desist from taking action which imposes great hardship on the community and particularly their fellow workers, and which, if continued, could easily lead to unionists becoming undisciplined rabble." (Herald, 24/12/46, our emphasis.)

Comments; Mr. C. N. McKay, deputy president of the Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers, and senior vice-president of the Australian Metal Industries Association: "The strong and clear message for 1947 by the P.M. arrived like a flash of sunshine in the 'darkened industrial sky.'" (Age 26/12/46)

Sydney 'Sun', 29/12/46: "Few political observers would deny that if Monizés had won the elections his Xmas message would have taken practically the same line as Chifley's."

For the Record

When the English Labor Party government decided to attempt to break the London transport strike by using troops as scabs, the Minister for Food (Mr. Strachey) made the following statement: "It is the duty of the Government for hungry and hypocritical... 'Military labor would operate, but I emphasize that in performing this duty the Food Ministry is not intervening in this industrial dispute or implying any opinion on the men's claims.'" (Herald, 11/1/46)

This should go in the scrapbook of Labor Party supporters.

BEER AND SOCIALISM

Mrs. A. Groeneweg, Toowoomba, Qld., writes: "Somebody sent me 'S.C.' for August, '46. I read it with great interest, but must take exception to one sentence, e.g., 'Order, you talk about the Present Order.' Under the many items, included in the expense of every worker—I hope not—you mention BEER. It was surprised that a paper which is printed to enlighten the workers, you mention beer, as a necessity. If you want to fight for a better world for the workers, then you should advise every class-conscious worker to leave beer alone. It should not be possible, at election times for instance, that you can buy a worker's vote for a couple of glasses of beer, and let us know that people who drink alcohol are not to be trusted. The Alcohol Combines know that quite well and induce men to drink—the more they drink the less they think. In Europe there are societies of neutral labor-temperance unions (These should be started in Australia. We're not asking the workers to start Christian Temperance Unions, but just to fight Alcohol—the greatest enemy of humanity and the workers in particular.)"

REPLY: The paragraph to which our correspondent objects occurs in an article on "The Chief Justice Wants to Know Something about the Temperance Order." In a paragraph on the basic wage, W.J.C., the author of the article, wrote: "This system (i.e., the basic-wage index) does not take into consideration many items which are included in the expenses of every worker such as fares, amusements, tobacco, beer, newspapers, etc." ("S.C.", August, page 3.)

While statistics on the consumption per head of beer are available, there have none at hand showing the proportion of drinkers to non-drinkers in Australia. No doubt, not "every" worker spends money on beer.

Yet the statement was entirely correct—since it merely showed that what was included in the overwhelming majority of family budgets was not included in the basic wage index. We did not mention "beer as a necessity," but merely stated that it was considered as a part of the family budget of workers. Whether we agree with them on this point or not had nothing to do with the question at issue, i.e., the inadequacy of the basic wage index.

The Socialist Party, as a political organisation, considers the question of whether workers should or should not drink is a personal question. We recognise that alcohol serves as a means of escape from the ugly realities of wage-slavery—gives the worker a false importance of "being somebody" of escape into unreal heroics. BUT, and that is important, the same can be said of many other things under capitalism—for instance, the stage and screen, most popular magazines and books, etc. Are we therefore to advocate that no worker should go to the pictures or read magazines? It is extremely doubtful whether the 'head

THE FORUM

BEER AND SOCIALISM

fixing industry" (stage, screen, pulpit, press, schools, etc.) is not a more powerful weapon in the hands of the ruling class than is alcohol.

We make no bones of the fact that we favour the rapid consumption of cheap adulterated and rot-gut under-hygienic conditions as something desirable, and it is no secret that the majority of Socialists are non- or anti-temperance. This, however, does not mean that the party, as such can or should advocate total abstinence.

We would ask our correspondent to keep sense of proportion. The primary evils of Capitalism are poverty, insecurity and war. At the moment from India to China, from Germany to Spain, millions on millions of people are starving. Capitalism has produced horrors on a mass scale unparalleled in history. To ask us to concentrate our efforts on the eradication of alcohol and thus automatically (as the time and energies of the workers are limited), divert our attention from the main struggle for the abolition of Capitalism, is hardly logical.

Two more points arise: There is no need "to buy the worker's votes for beer"—unfortunately, at every election, the workers vote quite soberly for Capitalism—not realising that they are voting for further depression, unemployment, and war. As for the organised temperance movement, this requires a different attitude from the consumerist attitude of the party. Fused with the question of personal abstinence. Mrs. A. G. says there "are hundreds of neutral-labor-temperance unions" in Europe. We presume these are "religiously neutral."

These unions were mostly appendages of the Social Democratic movement. They are therefore hardly "neutral" from the political point of view. In so far as cultural clubs, chess clubs, collecting clubs, anti-alcoholic organisations, etc. are used by any political party to increase and enhance the influence of that party, they become pseudo-political organisations.

As for strictly non-political temperance organisations, we would point out that these always direct their energies against the "evils of drink" AS FAR AS THE WORKERS ARE CONCERNED. They do not collect, do not drink, do not pass in silence over the drunken orgies of the ruling class. They are very often supported by big capitalists, for two reasons: First, a sober worker is a more reliable drunk as a producer of profit for the boss. Secondly, if the ruling class can convince the workers that some particular article is not necessary for their well-being, they can CUT WAGES ACCORDINGLY. Wages, the price of labor power, fluctuate with supply and demand, and are influenced by the military over the industrial struggles.

The "price of labor power" finally boils down to what it takes to keep the workers fed, clothed and sheltered just well enough so that they can produce the surplus value and have children. But the standard of living of the workers varies from country to country—and the lower the "recognized" price of labor power, the more it is up with' standard of living is, the

PAGE THREE

more profits for the bosses. Hence, a vegetarian, non-drinking, non-smoking working class worker is clearly from the capitalists point of view as long as they could produce profits efficiently.

In the trade-unions, therefore, instead of the workers fighting to raise the standard of living, and in Australia they are concerned with including as part of the alleged luxuries in the basic wage index as tobacco—this would include beer and tobacco—although they may be of the opinion that these are not beneficial to the working class from the point of health. However, inclusion of such items would not force workers to spend the additional wage thus gained on beer or tobacco. They could and would spend it as they see fit.

On the political field, we are not to be side-tracked by any minor evils of capitalism be they capital punishment or alcoholism. We fight relentlessly for the total abolition of this insane system and the establishment of Socialism. On this, and this alone, must our efforts be concentrated.

—R.Y.

UNIONISTS AND NON-UNIONISTS

With reference to the par in our January issue on compulsory unionism, we have been asked the following question: "While I agree that your attitude is correct, is it not true that non-unionists refuse to join the union, yet derive considerable benefits from union action? Therefore, in spite of your objections, should they not be compelled by law to join?"

REPLY:

Yes, it is true that non-unionists get benefits won by union struggles. But, before starting to throw stones, the majority of unionists ought to have a look at their own glass-house! It is not equally true that a large number of unions have taken no active part whatever in recent strikes for working class demands, such as the £1 increase, etc. It is not equally true that what gains are achieved by strike action are usually achieved by the action of SOME unionists—not by all actual unionists.

We have not noticed any reluctance on the part of those unions who haven't done anything for decades, to accept gains made by unions which have been successful in their struggles. Besides, the argument, carried to its logical conclusion, leads to the old I.W.W. motto: "An injury to one is an injury to all." It would mean that all strikes would be more or less general strikes.

Are those who put the above question prepared to face up to its implications? If they were, well and good, they would have a case. But they know as well as we do that they are not.

—Ed. Conin.

A French View on Indo-China.

The recent clashes between French troops in Indo-China and the Vietnams (republican) movement there has produced the usual Stalinist remarks. We are told that we must here should support the Vietnams, and the same arguments are trotted out as last year when Indonesia was in the news. It is therefore interesting

to read a French paper on the situation:

"Vietnam is a capitalist government, constituted by capitalist parties. It represents the Indo-Chinese bourgeoisie, which is no different from other capitalists, all living on the exploitation of the workers. And behind the Indo-Chinese bourgeoisie, supporting it, or rather making it jump like a puppet, there stand various imperialism, especially Russian imperialism. That is the reason why Vietnam is supported in all countries by the agents of Russian Imperialism: the Stalinists and the Trotskyists."—From: "Le Proletaire," Lyons, France, January, 1946.

"On Lenin's Tomb."

"The Russian people is slowly being conditioned to a collective leadership. For the second consecutive year, Premier Stalin did not stand in his traditional place atop Lenin's tomb to review the parade celebrating the 29th year of the October revolution. In the key speech of the demonstration, Marshal Leonid A. Govorov, a Lenin-grad boss, pointed to the necessity of increasing Russia's fighting power. Andrei A. Zhdanov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet . . . spoke in its session about the hardships of the present five-year plan.

Thus, while—the super-purge envelops all sections of Soviet life, while the transfer and retransfer of populations is accelerated by the reorganisation of Eastern Europe, the Politburo wisely prepares Russia . . . (for) the fact that Stalin is replaceable, that Soviet power is built on the domination of the ruling oligarchy."

(q. from "The Russian State Party" Newsletter on Contemporary Communism, New York, Nov., 1946.)

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S.P.A.

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 the working class will involve 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

LECTURES

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Feb. 11th: "The Future of Trade Unionism." — T. Dennis.

Feb. 25th: "William Morris," Poet, Artist and Socialist." — C. Sanders.

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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 call upon the members of the working class of this country to master under their banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought 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.

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