

SOCIALIST COMMENT

SOCIALIST
PARTIES
OF
AUSTRALIA and
NEW ZEALAND

VOL. II, No. 5.

JANUARY, 1947.

ONE PENNY

THE STRIKES

BACKGROUND AND LIMITATIONS.

The present industrial trouble has brought forward the usual shibboleths from the daily press: This war's aftermath is "the work of the Communist Party" as the last war's troubled end was "the work of the I.W.W." In each case there is an evident reluctance on the part of those who are loudest in the anti-strike clamor to admit the possibility of any objective cause for unrest.

Let us admit at once that we are not concerned to deny that the "Communist" Party uses industrial trouble to further its own devious policy—in fact, it is one of the most efficient "band waggon" riders in existence. But the present trouble, like that of the last post-war period, goes deeper than mere agitation, if any such thing exists.

OVERTIME—AT ANY PRICE.

To get to the root of the matter we must cast our memories back to the post depression days just before the outbreak of war, to the days when for the first time for many years your average worker was able to rub a couple of two shilling pieces together in his pocket. When industry, and more particularly, heavy industry was booming, and when, instead of working half time, the boss expected, and found the workers only too eager to work, overtime. This was the time when the prospect of taking home what was a bulging wage packet compared with two or three years previously, was something which did not permit of a detailed analysis of the possibilities inherent in the situation as it then existed.

Indeed, such was the anxiety for a little extra that men in heavy industry were willing, and thought they were able, to work twelve hours a shift, seven days a week. This became so much the rule that all thought of a reduction of hours, a reduction made possible by the advance of industrial technique, was forgotten, and there grew up an acceptance by all but a few workers, of the longer hours as the standard working week.

This situation was furthered during the war by pressure from Chauvinistic groups in the interests of internal propaganda, among whom was of course the "Communist" Party. There was now a further incentive to overtime work, the workers found that unknown to most of them the mechanism of prices was on the move in an upward direction: true to the laws of capitalist society prices were as high as the market would stand, and that market was buoyant.

LIVING STANDARDS FALL.

Although few as yet realised it, the working class were already on a lower

standard of living than previously, their overtime pay being watered down by rises in the prices of practically every commodity, and further, they were working on an average of fifty-two hours a week for this reduced purchasing power.

And now the spell has been broken; with the cessation of hostilities overtime was drastically cut, particularly in heavy industry, and the full force of the reduced purchasing power of wages was brought home to the workers. This was worsened by the fact that taxation was already at an unprecedented high level, so that as the changeover in production occurred, overtime was once more looked to as a savior, but despite the overtime a pound on pre-war standards will only exchange for about twelve and sixpence worth of goods at the present time, as any housewife can easily verify from her daily purchases.

PRESSURE OF RANK AND FILE.

The reaction has now set in and the workers are now attempting to

"AS SOCIALISTS WE ARE VERY MUCH CONCERNED WITH THE WORKERS' EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING AGAINST THE ENCRAGEMENTS OF THE EMPLOYING CLASS AND WITH THE WORKERS' ADVANCEMENT TOWARDS SOCIALISM. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE WORKERS ANYWHERE IS THE BUSINESS OF SOCIALISTS EVERYWHERE."

—"Socialist Standard," Sept., 1944.

make up the ground lost through their largely self-imposed wartime restriction on struggles over wages; the trade union leaders, reluctant as these well established bureaucrats are to set in motion the organisational machinery of trade union resistance, are being forced into activity by the growing pressure of rank and file discontent over wages and hours of work.

WAGES AND PRICES.

Now the hoary old shibboleths come thick and fast from the daily press with one voice they shout the warning about inflation, and point to what they consider to be an automatic effect of an increase in wage rates, an increase in prices. They allege that as soon as a wage increase is gained prices of commodities produced by the industry in which the wage increases take effect, will increase by an amount proportionate to the wage increase.

How easy would be the study of economic phenomena if things were run on these lines, that is on the lines suggested by the daily press! Instead of prices fluctuating about a norm according to the pressure of supply and demand, all the seller of commodities would have to do would

be to fix an arbitrary price and increase the price whenever the pressure of working class demands made it necessary.

The seller of commodities, that is, your boss and mine, struggles against the workers' demands for higher wages and shorter hours simply because he realises that other things being equal an increase in the wage rate of his particular industry means a lower rate of profit for him.

MILITANCY PAYS!

The workers are told that struggling for higher wages and the strikes that arise out of this struggle are no good to the worker, but the lie direct is given to this by the fact that those unions whose militancy and organisation are unexploited have a lower wage rate, with fewer extras, and more pinch-penny classifications, than those unions whose organisational strength is exploited at every favorable opportunity. A comparison between the wage rates of the building trades workers and the engineering trades workers is sufficient to prove this.

In this connection the building trades union was particularly active in the boom period before the late

war, whereas the engineering trades unions were not only inactive in the struggle for higher wages and improved conditions, but imposed on themselves certain restrictions with regard to union activity during the war, a swell as allowing a terrific amount of dilution of the trade.

Enough has been said, we think, to indicate that those who shout the loudest about the workers acting in a "sensible" manner are those who are afraid that the worker is learning too well to be "sensible." In his own interests he is prepared to struggle about the price of his labor power and not be taken in by the capitalist apologists' lack of knowledge of capitalist economics.

LESSONS OF WAR PERIOD.

The worker has only to reflect for a moment to see the fallacy of all this talk of automatic increase of price following increases of wage rates: in his own case his wages have been pegged now for some years, yet prices have soared. A familiar example is motor cars—at the present time, although the amount of socially necessary labor embodied in a motor car has not increased, but if anything has decreased, and although wages have

STRIKES.—Continued.

not increased here in America to show just what the price of new motor cars is close to twenty-five per cent. up on pre-war prices.

The main reason for every wage increase in this connection is that the prices of commodities are the result of struggle between buyer and seller, and the price of labor-power or wages is no exception.

LIMITATIONS OF T. U. STRUGGLES

One thing that must be pointed out, however, is that the struggle over the price of substitutes is not the real struggle for all of the class struggle; this struggle has its natural limitations. Inasmuch as it is a struggle within the confines of the capitalist mode of production over conditions of work, and as such leaves the larger question of the continuance of this mode of production untouched, this side of the class struggle leaves the foundations of the capitalist system intact.

The Socialist Party of Australia puts this proposition in another way. In the long run every worker will find himself faced with the inevitable conclusion that the day to day struggle is not as successful as far as the conditions of capitalist permit, and that behind this day to day struggle lies the necessity for a change in social relations, with the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and with it the wages system as its cardinal feature.

—T.D.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY SOCIALISM?"

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"IS STATE OWNERSHIP SOCIALISM?"

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POLITICS IN PALESTINE

(Continued from December Issue)

MILLIONS AT STAKE.

The British capitalist class not only pursues its strategic interests in Palestine but also economic interests. It owns or controls the bulk of the foreign concessions in Palestine which include 52.2 per cent. of the capital invested in the Dead Sea potash concession which is owned by the Palestine Potash Syndicate, whose

possessor is Lord Melchett, a leading Zionist; Imperial Chemical Industries. It is estimated that the Dead Sea contains 2,000,000 tons of Potassium Bromide, 1,000,000 tons of Magnesium Bromide, 1,000,000 tons of Sodium Chloride, 6,000,000 tons of Calcium Chloride, whilst Potash is considered almost inexhaustible. At present 400,000 tons of minerals are estimated at \$1 million million and can be extracted with very little capital cost. Further, oil experts con-

sider that one of the world's greatest oil deposits lies under the Dead Sea. Codrle Bofrage quotes Colonel Traak, of the board of the company, as saying there is £20 million worth of Polish and \$100,000 million worth of Bromide in the Dead Sea and concludes that there was more wealth there than was invested in all the capital stock of the world's industries. It was by far the most valuable thing in Palestine, and England had, of course, grabbed hold of it while leaving Jews and Arabs to fight it out for the valuable parts of the carcass. ("Away From It All," p. 54.)

This aptly sums up British capitalism's role in Palestine. The Jews and Arabs quarrel over the crumbs, Britain has no intention of settling their disputes as it gives the British armed forces an excuse to protect the interests of the British ruling class in the Middle and Near East, the Suez Canal and the Eastern Mediterranean.

"DIVIDE AND RULE."

The British Government through the Colonial Office keeps a tight rein on the administration in Palestine by "virtually excluding the people of Palestine from any hand in them. There is no Palestinian in any position of real official responsibility." ("The Economist," May 25, 1946.) Britain governs Palestine as a British colony, as in reality it is, and uses the Roman technique of divide and rule. Dr. J. L. Magnes, Chancellor of the Hebrew University, puts Britain's position, "Thus there has been no Palestinian in any position of real authority since 1920 to 1926. He was also past president of the Employers' Federations of Australia—a severe test for the judicial position."—Melbourne "Herald," 2/11/46.

What is it extremely unlikely that the Jewish and Arab propertied classes could come to an "openly negotiated agreement." It is certain that the British capitalist class will prevent it if their interests are jeopardised.

The three cornered struggle that has been dealt with in this political and economic struggle accentuated by language and religious differences. The struggle is between Arab feudal Landown, Jewish capitalism and British imperialism. It is a struggle of properly classes for political power, and none of the contestants have shown any intention of sharing this power with the other contestants in Palestine. All three, however, try to obtain the support of the working class, and to a great extent the workers do support the various nationalist organisations, Zionist or Arab, as do the workers in the advanced capitalist countries.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE.

The "hot house" development of capitalist production in Palestine has been a parallel development of the working class organisations. Zionism has supplied the capitalists who have investment funds with the necessary skilled labor power for the production of surplus value. The number of Jewish workers has increased from 4,400 in 1920 to 65,000 in 1942, and Jewish workers are 77 per cent. of the working class of

Palestine. The Jewish workers who have immigrated from Europe are industrially advanced Europe do the skilled work, whilst the Arabs who are industrially backward are confined generally to the unskilled work. This does not prevent Jewish and Arab workers working together amicably in various industries, agriculture, etc., however, they are divided into two trade union groups, the Arab Trade Unions—which were formed despite the opposition of the British authorities—and Histadruth, the Jewish Trade Union Wing of the Zionist Organisation.

Whilst the Arab Trade Unions, as far as the matter of funds obtained, are very little different to the Trade Unions here, Histadruth "is not a labor organisation in our sense of the word" and all the other objectives are constantly subordinate to its chief objective—that of aiding in the establishment of the Jewish National Home. ("Palestine," by W. C. Lowndes, p. 96.) It was this Zionist outlook that caused the failure of the attempt made in 1923 to unite the two trade union organisations.

E. A. WATKINS.
(Continued in next issue.)

CUTTINGS & COMMENTS

Sir Isaac Isaacs, commenting on the McKell affair: "The objection of political disqualification could be met by the appointment of an Acting Chief Justice Drake-Brockman was appointed to the Arbitration Court in 1927 by the Bruce-Paige Government. He was a senator and served as Chief Justice from 1929 to 1926. He was also past president of the Employers' Federations of Australia—a severe test for the judicial position."—Melbourne "Herald," 2/11/46.

No Difference.

"Two Hollywood movies, 'Destination Tokio' and 'Thirty Seconds Over Berlin' by U.S. officials, after German newspaper writers protested that both glorified war. The critics complained that it's too hard to explain to their readers 'why Allied war pictures are different' from Hitler films banned by the U.S."—"From 'The Militant,' U.S.A., July 27, 1946.

No Sun for Slum Dwellers.

"We made several other calls. Even strolling around the slums of the track areas of Fitzroy and North Carlton it seemed obvious that if anything, the Lady Gowrie report erred on the side of conservatism when it estimated that 70 per cent. of these homes in these districts never see the sun."—Melbourne "Herald," 2/11/46.

By Gad, Sir! "The whole community should surely agree that the shareholders of companies have taken their knock very hard. These peoples' sons were in the firing line, too, and all sacrifices were well born for the company's sake."—Sir Keith Murdoch, chairman of his annual Review to shareholders of The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd. ("Herald," 2/11/46).

French Nationalism. "French Nationalism leaders have played up nationalism in post-war France as the Soviet leaders used in the sentiment 'our work and our nation are in wartime Russia.'"—Age, 2/11/46.

THE FORUM

ESPERANTO AGAIN.

Mr. F. R. BANHAM, Melbourne, whose original letter appeared, with our reply, in the October "Comment," has written again and asks us to publish an article of his in reply. Here, with his main points, are:

"The glaring defect' of Bodmer is that he knows next to nothing about Esperanto. This can be proved page by page from the course of his article, which swarms in misstatements and errors of fact.

Bodmer merits no consideration. His assertions of the fact that Esperanto have been contradicted time and again by other scholars

Where is Basic English making headway? What is the fact that English is understood by 500 millions? It is only the administrative language of colored millions—a different thing. How does the fact that 520 language projects have been put forward detract from Esperanto, which must be judged on its own qualities?

I challenge the assumption that the tendency is against the more languages. There is absolutely no evidence that national languages are tending towards synthesis and the unplanned evolving of one world speech-form.

The language barrier is an advantage to the ruling class in that it keeps from the workers the means possible to those who are able to pay translators where even their own superior education and facilities fail them. The Yugo-Slavs, for instance, through lack of a world public language by means of a common language, cannot get their case across, and the Anglo-Saxons are forced to read whatever their less massive means of communication. This decided presentation hostility is early engendered and so wars are born. The hardly acquired and narrowly disseminated English translations have many drawbacks—doubtful fidelity, late appearance, suspect sources, all tend to dissatisfaction.

How "internationalists" and men of universal aspirations can grow from an attempt to elevate humans from a linguistic state lower than that of apes baffles me. One thing seems certain. No people will voluntarily, even compulsively, accept the hegemony of another, with its very real menace of spiritual and economic absorption.

That the coming of an int. lang. would be easier under socialism I do not doubt, but the world being what it is there is all to gain by a generalisation of the use of some common language, based on the world's chief culture tongues and informed by a spirit sympathetic to the groups characterized by agglutination such as Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, Japanese and others. Such is Esperanto.

Justice: South African Version.

"A young native girl was today sentenced to six months' imprisonment because she bore a child to a European youth. The father was given a sentence of one year's imprisonment under the Immorality Act."—"Herald," 1/27/46.

"Unfortunate." "Judge Foster said (in interim basic wage enquiry) it was an unfortunate feature of the system that the workers' work and labor is based on for years and the worker never quite caught up."—"Herald," 2/11/46.

from it, without giving the page, and on trying to locate it we found that he left out a most important part of the quote. Whether Bodmer makes mistakes of fact in regard to Esperanto or is just irritable, but we do not think that Mr. Banham did not attempt to discredit his main points, nor did he "disparage" an "authority" on language if that were the case. If Bodmer is good enough to be quoted by Mr. Banham, we see no reason why we should not do likewise. (2) Mr. Banham says that the statistics given here give the relative number of people speaking English (200 million) and Esperanto (125,000 at the best).

(3) While it is true that 520 language projects do not invalidate Esperanto itself, it is also true that this shows Esperanto's claim to be an international, easy language to be false. Or would Mr. B. dismiss all other 519 inventors of languages as cranks? (4) We are not prejudiced in favor of basic English, but merely pointed out that the general tendency is towards some sort of basic existing language. We wrote: "A further assumption is that granting the adoption of some auxiliary international language (WHETHER BASIC ENGLISH OR AN ARTIFICIAL ONE LIKE ESPERANTO, IS IMMATERIAL) this would help to bring about world peace. This view is also erroneous."

(5) Mr. B.'s lack of understanding of Capitalism is revealed in what he writes about "World public." We would challenge him, for instance, to try and get a true description from an esperanto speaking worker in Russia, of the State Capitalism prevailing there. It is not a question of "linguistic censorship" but of political suppression. The ruling class where control the press, radio, etc., and naturally are not favorably disposed towards using these means for anti-capitalist propaganda. Would Mr. B. maintain that an Esperanto press would be less pro-capitalist than a non-esperanto one?

(6) Finally, before you have "cultural hegemony" you must have economic hegemony—not vice versa. We still think it is not anything to gain to gain let alone "all to gain" by the use of Esperanto, even if it were 100 per cent. perfect and truly international. Workers should concentrate their energies on fighting Capitalism, not on chasing the 1001 will-o'-the-wisp, linguistic or otherwise.

Let us which the well-meaning but mistaken reformists urge them to support.

—H.H.

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CUTTINGS.—Continued.

In the Worker.

"The worker is the fellow who has got the axe both ways. In the first place his wages are being cut, apart from a small war-time loading and minor cost-of-living adjustments, his gross earnings are virtually not a great deal more than before the war. A goodly slice of taxation decreases his gross earnings, so that his 'take home' pay averages 12½ per cent. less than his pre-war average. On top of this, consumer and utility commodities have increased by a minimum of 35 per cent. on pre-war prices. Thus a simple index will show that his standard has dropped by 35 per cent. In other words, he cannot live upon what he gets today."—"Age," 2/11/46, their emphasis.

A Thought for the New Year. "Atom bombs can be made cheaply in large numbers, and will become more destructive There is no military defence against the atom bomb."—Committee of American Atomic Scientists of in "Herald," 1/11/46.

Compulsory Unionism? "Requests by the A.C.T.U. that compulsory unionism should be made the rule of industry will be considered in the early next year."—"Herald," 1/11/46.

We are entirely opposed to compulsory unionism brought about by the interference of an outside body, the Government. Men who are forced to join unions will not take any interest in the Union. It is an pathetic group on whose backs "leaders" will find it even easier to climb into power than they do now. What a position, when the A.C.T.U. which is supposed to represent the workers on the economic field and to fight against capitalist encroachments of living standards, asks the State, i.e., the executive committee of the ruling class, the make membership of unions compulsory! Such legislation would further emasculate the unions, tie them even firmer to the State machine, provide a happy hunting ground for job hunters, and hinder, if not prevent, the growth of any independent working-class outlook in them.

—H.

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be able to proceed in a single country only?"

Answer: No. The great industry has already, through the circumstances that it has created the world market, brought all the peoples of the earth, and particularly the civilised people, into such close connection with one another that every single people is dependent on what happens to another. Further, it has equalised social development in all civilised lands to the extent that in all these lands bourgeois and proletariat have become the two decisive classes of society, the struggle between the two, the two principal struggles of the day. The Communist Revolution, therefore, will be no merely national one, it will be a Revolution proceeding simultaneously in all civilised countries; that is, in England, America, France and Germany at least. It will develop quicker or slower in each of these countries according as the one or the other countries possesses a more perfected industry, a greater wealth, a more considerable mass of productive forces. Its accomplishment, therefore, will be slowest and hardest in Germany, swiftest and easiest in England. It will likewise have a considerable reaction on the remaining countries of the world, and entirely alter and greatly accelerate their previous mode of development. It is a universal Revolution, and will therefore have a universal terrain also.—Quoted, in full, from Engels' "Principles of Communism" (1847) Workers' Intelligence Bureau Ed., p. 21-22.

CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED.

Melbourne: M. McD., 6d.; H.H., 2/-; Y.L., 5/-; Stanhope, Vic.: R.D., 5/6; Selby, Vic.: J.T., £2. Gilliat, Qld.: R.P., 10/- Total for December: £3/3/-

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Treasurer,

"Socialist Comment."

P.O., Box 1440-M, Melb.

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"In keeping with their decision to maintain the prices and wages introduced under the Nazis, the occupation authorities forbade the trade unions to press for higher wages. In the atmosphere of discontent the role of the trade unions is becoming more difficult. Their leadership is anxious to avoid conflicts with the British Military Government. But it is feeling more and more strongly the pressure for some action that comes from the rank and file; and it cannot help yielding to that pressure and voicing the grievances of German workers."—"Age," 7/12/46, our emphasis.

Seems as if German T.U.'s are not so different from ours, doesn't it?

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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

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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 muster 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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