

A REVIEW
OF THE
REPORT TO THE IRONWORKERS'
UNION FEDERAL COUNCIL
AND
COMMUNISTS
AND
THE WAR

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COMMUNISTS AND THE WAR

"We must see that the war changes for us, when the character of the war changes. Does it change because Russia, as Russia, is now in the war? IT CHANGES BECAUSE NOW THE WORKERS' RUSSIA IS IN THE WAR, BECAUSE THE WORKERS' RED ARMY NOW GUARANTEES THE DEFEAT OF THE NAZIS AND NOW GUARANTEES A DEMOCRATIC PEACE."

Mr. E. Thornton's Report to the Ironworkers' Union Federal Council, June, 1942.

I HAVE just read two reports. One is called "Trade Unions and the War," and was published by the Ironworkers' Federal Council last June. It records the Union's policy on the War. The other is called "Grim Glory" and was published by a man named Gilbert Mant, who was Reuter's War Correspondent during the Malayan campaign. It records the undying heroism of the Australians who fought in that ill-fated campaign, and it was published last July.

And as the Federal Council of the Ironworkers' Union had not read "Grim Glory" before it published its ambitiously entitled report, it is probably able to plead ignorance on some few matters concerned with modern warfare. In any case, this is the most charitable view to take, as it is far better to assume that people are stupid than to admit that they have forgotten that they are Australians, and that Australian blood has been liberally shed in their defence against Japan.

The alleged opinions of the Ironworkers' Union (as expressed by its Federal Council) are not, however, the opinions of the Australian Trade Union Movement, which declared its opposition to Nazism, and its readiness to defend Australia, in 1939, and which, unlike some people described as Trade Unionists (but with relatively short records of service in the Unions) has not found it necessary to change its policy since 1939.

Nor does the Ironworkers' Report express the opinions of the Australian Labor Party, which also declared its opposition to Nazism in 1939, and its

Undivided Allegiance

to the Allied cause, and which also has not found it necessary to change its policy since 1939.

Nor does the Ironworkers' Report express the opinions of 99 per cent. of Australians, who love their country, who hate Nazism, or any other form of political dictatorship, and who are working and fighting to defend Aus-

tralia, because they believe in Australia. Because they believe they possess the ability and courage to work out their social salvation in their own way. Because, in any case, they prefer the Australian capitalistic system to the German or Japanese capitalistic system; and because, above all, they are Australians, and, as Mr. Curtin said, loyal to this soil.

Australians, therefore, do not require Communist apologies served up to them through their trade unions, as reasons why they should defend their way of life against foreign despotisms.

The character of the war has not changed for Australians. Australians, like their British brethren, were defending their way of life against the Nazis long before Germany attacked Russia. They would have continued this struggle, irrespective of whether the Red Army, or any other Army . . . "guaranteed" . . . (to use Mr. Thornton's words) . . . "the defeat of the Nazis . . ."

Australians know that the British people fought the Battle for Britain, and won it, without such guarantees, and despite the bellyache of the British Communist Party during those terrible months when the skies rained death, and Britain faced her destiny, magnificently defiant and alone.

And Australians will face their destiny in that same high tradition. Australians will continue the struggle as they commenced it, irrespective of whatever new "changes" may distinguish Communist "explanations" of the war, including even Communist "explanations" published by Trade Unions such as the Ironworkers' Union.

For in so far as it deals with the War, the Ironworkers' Union "Report" is indistinguishable from Communist policy (at the moment), and it is only upon this basis that it can be analysed. Particularly when its author has been associated with that policy from its inception. And particularly when that policy is conspicuous for those pecu-

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liar little bits of forgetfulness which distinguish the publications of the Communist Party, but which should not distinguish the publications of any Trade Union. And more particularly when the "Report" has for its noble object the whitewashing of the Communist Party.

THE SWITCH

The "Report" commences by admitting that, before Germany attacked Russia, the Ironworkers' Council declared the War to be Imperialist, and that its delegation to the A.C.T.U. in 1941

"supported a resolution demanding negotiations for a democratic peace."

This is true, although neither the ironworkers' delegations nor the Communists succeeded in showing the Congress just how the "democratic peace" was to be obtained.

And one of the Communist arguments at that time was that if peace were made, the people of Germany would themselves overthrow Hitler and German capitalism.

The Communist "Tribune" of October 20, 1939, said that

"The destruction of Hitlerism and the liberation of the Czechs and Austrians can safely be left to the Anti-Fascist victory of the people of Greater Germany themselves. This Victory, which would be assisted by the restoration of peace, is inevitable, sooner or later."

The "Report" then continues that "Our Management Committee met in October, 1941, and declared that the military defeat of the Axis Powers was the most important task of the world's workers."

In the interim, of course, Germany had attacked Russia, and the Ironworkers' Council (and the Communist Party) had not only changed their views upon the "character of the war," but had also changed their views as

to how Hitlerism was to be overthrown. This, however, is only one of the remarkable "changes" which have distinguished Communist policy, and is more evidence of rapidity than deceit. But deceit is not lacking. For on page 6 we read that:

"Any suggestion that when Germany marched into Poland, the war took place over Polish independence, is incorrect. The war was a war between Britain and France on the one hand, and Nazi Germany on the other. It had the same Imperialist character as the war of 1914-18."

This may be true. But if it is, the Communist Party and its trade union politicians were peculiarly mistaken when in the "Guardian" of September 9, 1939, they told the trade unionists (including the members of the Ironworkers' Union), that:

"This war, launched for the purpose of the conquest of Poland, and its subjection to the Fascist Empire of Hitler, of Krupp, of Thyssen, the German Monopoly Capitalists, is an act of stark aggression, without justification of any kind whatever. Therefore, lovers of justice and liberty throughout the world will support the struggle of the Polish people for their independence and against enslavement to a foreign Power."

But, of course, this was before the German-Russian Pact, and the Communists had not yet discovered that the War was Imperialist, and that the overthrow of Hitler could safely be left to the German workers. And if the Communists were mistaken, surely there is some excuse for the Federal Council of the Ironworkers' Union.

But let sweet charity draw a veil over this unfortunate phase of various Communist "explanations" upon the intriguing subject of "Trade Unions and the War," and proceed to the next remarkable argument submitted by the Federal Council of the Ironworkers' Union.

"The leading circles of the Second International are acting the most filthy and criminal part in the blood-dripping slaughter machine of the war. They are deceiving the masses by their homilies on the anti-fascist character of the war, and are helping the bourgeoisie to drive the people to the slaughter."

Dimitrov, General Secretary Communist International (before Germany attacked Russia).

THE most amusing parts of the Ironworkers' Council's Report are the Communist apologies for their changed attitude towards the Labor Parties, including the Australian Labor Party.

After explaining that the "Character" of the War had changed because Russia was attacked, the author hastens to plaintively ask:

"How could the workers put any trust in people who alone led the Allies before June 22, 1941, even without the military tragedies that followed one after the other for the whole military machine of Great Britain?"

"The people who led the Allies early in the war were people who all their lives had been opposed to the working class. As well as the military leadership, the civil leadership of the Allied cause was in the hands of Anti-working class people."

This last sentence is, of course, best answered by the Communist Party itself, which, in the Communist "Tribune" of September 9, 1939, issued the following statement:

"We stand for the full weight of Australian manpower and resources being mobilised for the defence of Australia, and along with other British forces for the defeat of Hitler, for a democratic Germany, and for the independence of nations now enslaved by Nazism."

And to make its policy even clearer: "We hold that it is unreal to reject on principle the organisation and training of forces to fight overseas. In the event of a voluntary expeditionary force being organised for use in any part of the world to safeguard Australia from aggression or to participate directly in the struggle to defeat the aggressor armies."

The Communist Party will advise fit and available members to offer their services."

Apparently the Communists were quite prepared to trust the Chamberlain and Menzies Governments with

even the lives of their own members in September, 1939.

For, at that time, the British Labor Party had not entered into the National Government and in Australia, to quote the Ironworkers Report (page 9):

"We had the pro-Fascist Menzies Government supposed to be conducting an Anti-Fascist war."

But this, of course, was before the Communists threw their first somersault, and Dimitrov discovered that—

"The leading circles of the Second International" (the Labor Parties) were "... acting the most filthy and criminal part in the blood-dripping slaughter machine of the war."

What, however, was the Communist policy—after British Labor entered the National Government?

The Communists vilified the British Labor Party in precisely the terms used by them to vilify the Australian Labor Party.

Therefore, it is amusing to read (page 9) another argument for the second Communist somersault, because

"Almost coinciding with this new change in the character of the war, a Labor Government came to office in Australia."

This, of course, is not true. The Communists changed their policy immediately after June 22, when Russia was attacked, and raucously supported the war during July, August and September, under the reactionary Fadden Government, before Labor assumed office in the October.

So that the argument of—"coincidence"—is approximately as factual as the rest of the arguments in the Ironworkers' Report.

And the funniest submission in the Ironworkers' Report is indubitably the cautious statement (page 9) that:

"The Labor Government is not a thoroughgoing workers' government in the full sense of the term, but it is an Anti-Fascist Government. Nobody could say that about the previous Federal Government, or of the people now in Parliament who were in that Government. We cannot say that Menzies, Spender and

Cameron are anti-Fascist. We know that Menzies is pro-Fascist."

But we can forget for the moment that the Communists were quite prepared to shed everybody's blood under the Menzies "pro-Fascist" Government in 1939, and under the Fadden Government in 1941, and we can examine some of their opinions of the Australian Labor Party during the period which commenced after the Russian-German Pact, and ended when Germany attacked Russia on June 22, 1941.

THE SECOND SWITCH

On January 6, 1940, the Communist "Guardian" informed its readers that

"Curtin makes Shameless War Propaganda,"

And that:

"The Federal Labor Leader, Mr. Curtin, is placing himself unashamedly at the disposal of the Menzies Government in its prosecution of the War,"

And that:

"Mr. Curtin is typical of the leaders of Social Democracy, who, despite their disguise, really stand in the camp of Capitalism, and serve its interests."

On February 17, 1940, while Labor was fighting to win Corio against the U.A.P. candidate, Mr. Vinton-Smith, the Communist "Guardian" reported that the Communist candidate, Dr. O'Day, addressed an "enthusiastic crowd of 500 people" in the Geelong West Town Hall, and stated amongst other things, that:

"This issue is clear. Smith and DEDMAN stand for war, for the interests and profits of the big financiers, for the death of thousands of Australians, for the resulting increased taxation and economic depression."

On March 30, we find the "Guardian" alleging that:

"FUEHRER CURTIN, Federal Labor Chief, arrogantly wipes out the democratic opinion of the most powerful State body of Australian Labor, and says it doesn't count."

On April 17, we find the "Guardian" advising its readers that:

"In recent actions the Federal Labor Leader, Mr. Curtin, has completely betrayed working class principles for which he once strongly stood."

And that:

"Today, the successful politician,

Curtin, divorced from the working class, joins with the capitalist gang in reviling the Land of Socialism."

And by April 18, we find the General Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union telling the A.C.T.U. Congress that the war is an Imperialist War, and that:

"While he agreed that working class unity is desirable in most matters, WAR IS NOT ONE OF THEM."

And that:

"For once he was IN AGREEMENT WITH MENZIES, that had the election lasted another month,

Curtin would have been in Khaki so changed was his policy from day to day."

And so the stream of Communist vituperation against the Australian Labor Party flowed on to June, 1941, until once again we find the General Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union telling an A.C.T.U. Congress that the war is an Imperialist War, and moving an amendment to the effect that:

"Congress demands the immediate nationalisation of the arms industries, and

Reaffirms its uncompromising hostility to military and industrial conscription."

But the anti-climax was not long coming. Within a few days, Germany attacked Russia, the Communists overnight changed from bleating lambs of Pacifism into roaring lions of war, and by December, 1941, we found the General Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union publicly stating that:

"I would not necessarily oppose conscription in all circumstances."

And by June, 1942, we find the Communists and the Federal Council of the Ironworkers' Union delicately disclosing to the workers that one of the "explanations" for their second switch in war policy is the assumption of office by a Labor Government headed by "Fuehrer Curtin, the Federal Labor Chief," who, if the Communists were to be believed last year, "really stands in the camp of capitalism, and serves its interest."

But if the Communists suffer from short memories, they do not lack impudence. So, inevitably we find the Federal Council of the Ironworkers' Union used as a convenient megaphone for Communists Second Front propaganda.

SECOND FRONT

LIKE the other Communist arguments in the Ironworkers' Report, the Second Front argument is conspicuous for those little fits of forgetfulness which distinguishes the publications of the Communist Party.

It seems incredible that in some 20 pages of what is described on the first page as a

"clear, detailed analysis of the situation both in Australia and abroad" . . . there is not one reference to the Russian-German Pact (24/8/39) or the Russian-Japanese Pact (12/4/41)

Instead, Page 6 informs us that the quick defeat of France

"can be attributed to the rotten capitalist, imperialist leadership of France and the Fascists who had wormed their way into the key positions in the French Government."

This may be true. But it is also true that the defeat of France can be attributed to other things.

For instance, the organised sabotage of the French Communist Party, which sought to end the war as soon as the Russian-German Pact was signed, and which did its best to smash the morale of the French workers.

Or perhaps France could have been saved by a Second Front in Europe. Who knows? There may be something in this idea, for so many people are now urging its potent powers.

Particularly as the Ironworkers' Report states that

"The main subsequent characteristic of the war was the steady defeat on every front of Great Britain after France had been defeated. We saw Yugo-Slavia overrun, quick defeat of Greece and the British troops in Crete, and the serious nature of the battle for the Atlantic, which resulted in millions of tons of Allied ships going to the bottom."

This account carefully omits any mention of the Battle for Britain, and it is possible to search in vain for any reference to the epic struggle of the British workers in defence of their island home.

Apparently the only sentiments permissible in the Ironworkers' "Report" are sentiments having nothing of any good to say about their own kinsmen, whose heroism and sacrifice during those terrible months

alone makes today possible, even the planning of a Second Front in Europe, and alone makes possible

today the enormous British supplies without which Russia could never have survived.

Instead, we are informed that "By the middle of last year Hitler thought he was strong enough, after drawing the teeth of Great Britain, to dispose of the Soviet Union and to grab the oil and other products necessary to clean up the world."

What is this but an admission that despite the "imperialist" character of the war before June 22, 1941, Russia would have been better off today if there had been a Second Front in Europe since 1939?

For if it was Hitler's intentions to smash Britain in the West, as an indispensable condition for the attack on Russia in the East, surely it would have paid Russia to have prevented the defeat of France, and the German occupation of Western Europe?

And the Nazi air war on Britain? At the worst, Russia could have been no worse off, for the Allies would have still held Western Europe and Germany would have been compelled to fight a Second Front for the past three years.

This possibility, like many others, finds no reference in either the Ironworkers' Report or in any of the Communist Party's clumsy attempts to falsify and distort history.

Instead, the usual arguments are backed up by the unqualified assertion that:

"The Second Front issue is not one that has been developed by armchair strategists. Who are the greatest military leaders of this war? One man stands out the greatest national and military leader of all—Stalin. He stands head and shoulders above anyone else, and he makes the demand for the Second Front."

Apparently the disposition of Allied forces (including Australians) is to be left to the judgment of Stalin and those people in the Allied countries who agree with him upon this question, at the moment.

(Or perhaps the Ironworkers' Council itself will determine grand strategy, in the event of another Dieppe).

But Australians will continue to prefer the judgment of their own race and their own Governments.

Two other remarkable admissions deserve honorable mention. Page 10 advises that:—

"Towards the end of last year, just after our management committee arrived at its decision to support the war, Japan entered into it. This did not alter the character of the war for us."

And page 12 advises that:

"We have decided that we have a new attitude to the war and a new attitude towards production. So our Management Committee decided to campaign for increased production. We campaigned to avoid strikes, with the result that we have been surprisingly successful, when we remember that our union has deliberately and in a planned way been involved in more strikes than other unions in the last few years.

"These were not just the sporadic strikes that are typical of the coalfields, but planned strikes, because we made strikes our business."

It would appear, therefore, that the Ironworkers' Union wants to increase production because Germany attacked Russia, and not because Japan attacked Australia. (As they point out, Japan's entry into the war "did not alter the character of the war for us.")

In other words, the Communists admit that their self-styled "campaign to increase production" is not connected with Australia's needs, but with Russia's needs.

Once this is understood, it is not difficult to assess the Communist "Second Front" propaganda at its real worth.

And irrespective of the admiration and sympathy, which all Australians instinctively feel for Russia's heroic resistance to the Nazis, Australians know that the small white population charged with the defence of our great island continent faces even greater peril than does Russia.

For Russia has the manpower to survive, while Australia, as a nation, could conceivably be utterly annihilated.

And while Australia's sons are fighting for our survival in the deadly jungles north of this continent, Australians can feel nothing but contempt for people who show no concern for this life and death struggle, but who are more concerned with getting reinforcements to Russia than they are concerned with getting reinforcements to New Guinea.

The Ironworkers' Report (page 11)

has the impudence to state that:—

"It is no accident that some people in the Labor Movement say, put Australia first. This is the attitude of the Fascist Stephenson gang, who call themselves the Australia First Movement."

It ill becomes people with the record of political chicanery held by the Communist Party to characterise as "Fascist" those Australian Laborites whose first allegiance is devoted to Australia.

Laborites reading the Ironworkers' Report (page 7) will find glowing references to the retreat of the Red Army from last June to November. They will find

no references to the magnificent retreat of less than 1000 Australians, surrounded by 15,000 crack Japanese troops, in the dank infested jungles of Malaya last February.

But these Australians were, of course, merely attempting to stem the deadly Japanese onslaught thrusting down upon Australia. And why should they be worthy of mention?

For the Communists point out in their Ironworkers' Report that they "arrived at its decision to support the war" before Japan entered it, and not because Japan entered it.

Australians will therefore assess the Communist lip service to the war, to Democracy, and to Labor at its true worth.

And as plain speaking seems the only answer to cynical falsification, the Communists should be reminded that Russia is our Ally today because Russia was attacked, and not because we were attacked.

That the magnificent struggle of the Russian people is primarily for the defence of their own country, and that Russian assistance to the Allied cause is at present confined to this defence.

That the success of this defence depends upon the ability of Great Britain and the U.S.A. to supply Russia, and engage Germany and Japan upon a dozen other Fronts throughout the world today.

That Australia, which itself is in desperate need of British and American assistance, is in no position to direct British and American policy in Europe.

That Australia is in desperate need of a Second Front in the Pacific.

That the first concern of Australians is the defence of Australia.

And that people who do not understand this simple truth have little claim to be known as Australians, and less claim to advise other people where they should do their fighting.