

The
Great
COAL STRIKE
Of 1949



By J. D. BLAKE

reject all of the proposals advanced by the mineworkers.

The Chifley Labour Government was determined to use all its powers in defence of the coal owners and to make war against the mineworkers. In provocative fashion industry was shut down on a wide scale in N.S.W. a week before the coal strike had even begun. Scores of thousands of workers were thrown out of employment as part

TREACHERY OF THE RIGHTWING LABOR PARTY LEADERS

All the events during the progress of the coal strike itself threw a clear light on the true nature of the Labour Governments. The strike provided the most concentrated exposure of the role of Social Democracy which has been experienced by the working class in Australia for many years. (Social Democracy is the theory and practice of the Labour Party leadership.)

In this situation the treacherous leaders of the Labour Party proved to be more useful to the Collins House monopolists than the Menzies Tory Party. The Labour Party leaders were able to mobilise all the Rightwing elements and traitors in the labour movement in a way which Menzies would have found it more difficult to do.

of the policy of the Chifley and McGirr Governments to manufacture hostility amongst the workers against the miners and to isolate the miners.

It is now well known that this plot failed as far as it related to the miners; its sole effect was to inflict unnecessary hardship and misery on countless thousands of workers.

Menzies himself has made it clear that in his view the policy pursued by the Federal Labour Government in relation to the coal strike was in fact the policy of the Liberal Party. Without doubt, Menzies could have added that Chifley did this job better than Menzies himself could have done it.

The fund freezing legislation introduced by the Chifley Government was one of the most vicious strike-breaking laws in Australian history. In their noisy speeches during the debate on the Act, a number of Labour politicians like Calwell said they had no intention of interfering with the workers' right to strike. Hypocrisy and cant could hardly be carried further! The

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Next stage in the unprecedented proceeding in the Court, in which contempt was used to sentences on union leaders there was no proceedings there was no fence, a refusal to act as or to give information affairs to the enemy of with a sentence of 12 months

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UNION LEADERS

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The freezing legislation introduced by the Government was one of the strike-breaking laws in Australia. In their noisy speeches during the passage of the Act, a number of Ministers like Calwell said they were against interfering with the right to strike. Hypocrisy and double-dealing may be carried further! The

Labour Government freezes the funds of the unions, stifles financial aid to the mineworkers on strike, and has the audacity to say it is not strike-breaking, but on the contrary to defending the right to strike.

In implementing this vicious legislation the Labour Government brought into play its tried and trusted weapon against the working class — the Arbitration Court. The judge selected to wield this weapon was also a Labour Party gentleman with a record of demagogic utterances — Judge Foster.

Next stage in the struggle was the unprecedented proceedings before the Arbitration Court, in which the weapon of contempt was used to inflict savage gaol sentences on union leaders. In these proceedings there was no trial and no defence, a refusal to act as a common informer or to give information on internal union affairs to the enemy of unionism was met with a sentence of 12 months' gaol.

It was a Labour Government which did this. It was the noisy champion of human rights Dr. Evatt who invented this legislation and perpetrated this criminal violation of the rights of workers. But maybe

the intellectual Dr. Evatt does not look upon workers as human.

The objective of these gaolings of union leaders by the Labour Government was to behead the unions on strike and leave the mineworkers without leadership in the struggle. This hope proved to be vain because the workers quickly threw up new leaders and commenced rapidly to improve their organisation throughout the coalfields.

Instead of weakening the fighting spirit of the mineworkers or their solidarity, the violent onslaught against them increased their fighting determination and this was revealed in the resounding votes for continuation of the struggle recorded at mass meetings in the middle of the strike. These votes were even more decisive than the vote at the original aggregate meetings which called the strike.

This militant fighting spirit of the miners forced the Labour politicians out of their secluded Canberra surroundings to stump the coal fields and take the platform on the Sydney Domain. This series of Labour Party meetings (which were discontinued after the end of the strike)

showed the Rightwing Labour politicians in their true colours. In all their speeches they poured abuse upon the miners and upon the Communist Party. Coming forward as the ardent defenders of the coal bosses, they ordered the miners to go back to arbitration and accept the will of the coal owners, the Coal Board and the arbitration system acting on their behalf.

The vicious strike-breaking campaign of the Labour politicians reached its all time low with the gutter language of Calwell in his notorious Sydney Domain speech. In this speech Calwell threatened the establishment of concentration camps to place militant workers behind barbed wire a la Hitler.

In the same speech Calwell boasted with pompous pride that "We unloaded the Haligonian Duke", in other words the Federal Labour Government came to the assistance of the Hollway Liberal Party Government in Victoria by using the navy to unload a shipload of coal declared black by militant unions in that State. The Labour Government came to the aid of a tory State Government and Calwell is proud of it. Calwell boasted of treachery and revelled in his unity with the Victorian

tories, thus clearly exposing the true role of the Labour Party leadership.

In the coal strike, the whole machinery of the Labour Party was set in motion with the object of strikebreaking. At the top of this strike-breaking apparatus stood the Federal and N.S.W. Labour Governments which proceeded to mobilise the A.L.P. State Executive, the Rightwing leaders of the A.C.T.U. and Labour Councils to defend the coal owners and make war on the coal miners. While the Fergusons, Clareys, Monks and Stouts were brought into action for their dirty work, Rightwing forces headed by Blair, were being thrown into action to disrupt the Combined Mining Unions Council, while on the Northern N.S.W. coalfields the Rightwing Labour Party agents, Crooks, Cockerill and Simpson, were assigned the task of disrupting the miners' front from within.

Elsewhere the A.L.P. leaders threw into action those other shock troops of disruption known as the "Groupers", who consist to a great extent of criminal elements and shady characters in the employ of the Security Police. In the full glare of publicity, the notorious Dobson story threw a brilliant light on the true nature

of these anti-working class the Labour Party leaders under the high-sounding Industrial Groups."

The purpose of all this of the Labour Party Rightwing confusion and divert attention from the real issue of the struggle was a battle between the Imperialists and the Communist miners were alleged to lookers. These efforts of traitors failed completely. ers in the process of almost bitter struggle learned the Party leadership. They let the Labour Governments a battle between the working capitalists, the Labour Party the ardent defenders of capital enemies of the workers.

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**of these anti-working class shock troops of
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under the high-sounding title of "A.L.P.
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The purpose of all this furious activity
of the Labour Party Rightwing was to sow
confusion and divert attention from the
real issue of the struggle and to create the
false impression that what was happening
was a battle between the Labour Govern-
ments and the Communist Party, while
the miners were alleged to be merely on-
lookers. These efforts of the Labour
traitors failed completely. The minework-
ers in the process of almost eight weeks'
bitter struggle learned the true nature of
the Labour Governments and the Labour
Party leadership. They learned that in
battle between the working class and the
capitalists, the Labour Party leaders are
the ardent defenders of capitalism and the
enemies of the workers.

MILITARY FORCES IN 1890 AND 1949

Betraying a cardinal point in the plat-
form of its own Party which declares:—
"No troops to be used in industrial dis-
putes," the Chifley Labour Government
ordered the use of military forces in open

The mineworkers learned in most con-
vincing fashion to see their true friends.
In this great mining struggle, the only
political party which fought uncondition-
ally and without equivocation in support
of the miners was the Communist Party,
which stood out as the sole party of the
working class in the test of battle. On the
coalfields it was the Communists who de-
voted all their organising skill to leading
the fight for the cause of the miners. In
Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and other big
cities, the Communists were the organisers
of support for the mineworkers' struggle
and for the supply of relief. The whole
of the Communist press in all States solid-
ly supported the miners' struggle and con-
tinuously brought the miners' claims before
the public and refuted the lies of the capi-
talist press.

cut mines to break the coal strike, Aus-
tralian workers have bitter memories of
the use of the army against the workers
by tory governments in the strikes of the
1890's. In fact it was out of those bitter

ast weeks of the great struggle
mining industry the situation
was one in which the Labour
ts and the daily press were
the Communists and militants
pursue the struggle on the
sues through to the bitter end.
us intention was to break the
mineworkers at the outer edges
ng breakaway movements for
work in such a way that the
dership and the Communist
be left high and dry and

f the strike-breaking activities
Secretary of the A.R.U. in
railworkers had been prevent-
ting in solidarity with the
various places black coal was
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oks, Cockerill, Simpson and
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nt in one of the main centres

As a result of these events the miners had come to feel that there was no way forward so far as continuing the struggle to fully secure their economic claims was concerned. In these circumstances it was clear that the time for resumption of work had arrived. The enemy desired that this resumption of work should take place under the control and direction of the Rightwing disruptive elements, thus leaving the militant leadership in a state of isolation.

Had this been allowed to take place all the tremendous political advances secured during the struggle could have gone for nothing.

A disorganised return to work would have produced the very result sought by the reactionary forces, namely, the breaking of the Miners' Federation, but instead of this the skill and boldness of the Communist and militant leaders retained the

The coal strike was of tremendous importance for the Australian working class. Firstly the workers secured in this struggle invaluable lessons on the true role of Labour governments, the A.L.P. leader-

initiative and the leadership in the hands of the best working class forces right through to the end, with the result that the plan of the Labour Government failed and the ranks of the miners are more solid than ever before, whilst the prestige of the Communist Party is the highest it has ever been on the coalfields.

Having failed to secure the objectives which they set themselves during the coal strike, Chifley, Evatt and Co. are now attempting to secure these objectives by other means. It is for this purpose that they introduced the amendments to the Arbitration Act taking control of union ballots and union affairs out of the hands of the workers as part of their plan to fascise the unions.

The working class must now launch a vigorous and prolonged struggle against this and all other attacks upon their trade unions.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

ship, or what is known internationally as Social Democracy. In contrast to this the workers saw the Communist Party as the only genuine working class party which demonstrated its skill, organising efficiency

and ability to lead great working class battles against capitalism.

Secondly, this great struggle established the fact that the Arbitration system has been made into a vicious bludgeon against the working class by the Labour Governments. There can be no illusions about the fact that as the economic crisis develops, this Arbitration system will be the chief weapon for imposing wage cuts, longer hours and worsening the conditions of the workers. As time goes on the workers will find themselves more and more in conflict with this weapon of the employing class.

Thirdly, the coal strike demonstrated that great working class victories can be won even though specific economic claims are not secured in the course of the strike. This is likely to be a more frequent feature in conditions of economic crisis. More and more the partial struggles face the workers with the great issue of the all-in-struggle against capitalism itself as the only way to a lasting solution.

Fourthly, the defence of unionism and the rights of unionists to regulate and determine their own affairs has now become a matter of first-rate importance for the

whole Australian working class. The battles on this front which are such a long-standing tradition of Australian workers must be fought again with redoubled vigour.

Finally, the conditions have been created for developing the fighting united front of the working class. It is the great responsibility of all Communists to help Labour Party workers fully to grasp the lessons to be learned from the coal strike. These Labour Party workers must never be lumped together with their Rightwing leaders. These workers will more rapidly move over to the banner of united working class struggle to the extent that the Communists show vigour and understanding in organising and developing this united front.

In pursuing this united front policy, no time should be lost and no opportunity should be missed to bring all the best working class fighters, all the splendid militants who came forward in the process of the coal strike, into the ranks of the Communist Party.

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