

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST CLUB

No 1 Wilmott Street

Sydney, New South Wales

May 1904

TO THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST CONGRESS

A M S T E R D A M

Comrades,

From far Australia, the International Socialist Club, (which is the only organization in Australia, that pays the Sustentation Fee to the International Bureau at Bruxelles) sends its greeting.

The long distances and the heavy expenses prevent us in Australia from being personally represented at Congress.

Your invitations have been sent to all Labour Councils in Australia, but for similar reasons as those no delegates have been appointed to attend Congress.

We have therefore to content ourselves with giving the enclosed report on the Working-Class Movement in Australia.

May your deliberations be such, as to further the cause of International Social Democracy.

With Hands across the Sea

The Executive

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REPORT ON THE SOCIALIST AND WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

IN AUSTRALIA.

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST CLUB SYDNEY

NEW SOUTH WALES.

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The history of the Socialist and Working Class movement in Australia during the past 3 years has been one of measured progress unmarked by any social or political crisis. So far as convinced Socialist opinion is concerned, the advance has been comparatively slow, though more or less extensive. In every State of the Commonwealth, Socialism is represented by an organisation generally small though aggressive which pushes the Socialist cause as far as possible by means of the printing and distribution of literature and by oral methods. As the aggressive propagandist movement is, comparatively speaking in its initiatory stages, its history is confined to continuous labour marked by some return in the way of the extension of the Socialist principle among the ranks of the working classes. Hitherto all effort in this direction has been practically isolated though during the last few months some attempts have been made to transform the work of a few scattered groups into what may eventually widen into a united Australian Movement. The political and economic side of our propaganda is however complicated by the existence of the Labour movement, an element which has, especially during the past two or three years been no mean factor in the development of public opinion. Essentially a working class movement, this Party had its origin in the great and extensive Social upheaval following the maritime strike in 1890 and its rapid rise and increasing influence on legislation has been especially noticeable during the past one or two years. The objective of the Labour Movement as stated

in its Programme is nothing short of Socialism, many of the immediate planks in its platform (attached) command the sympathy and support of Socialists and among the members of the Labour Party elected to the Commonwealth or Federal Parliament are many convinced Socialists. Nevertheless the bulk of the adherents of the Labour Movement are not Socialists a fact more to be attributed to the political isolation of Australia and various other causes than to anything inherent in the Australian worker. At the present moment the Labour Party in the Federal House of Representatives number, after the elections held last December, 24 out of a total of 75; and in the Upper House or Senate, elected partly at the same time and by universal suffrage, 14 out of 36, the remainder of the Houses being divided into Bourgeois parties separated by the fiscal policies of Free-trade and Protection.

The political situation of the last few weeks has resulted in the Labour Party being commissioned to form a Government in the Federal House. Under the circumstances this Government will scarcely make a Socialist programme a prominent feature of their administration, being in a minority, and it is scarcely to be expected that such a Government will be enabled to continue in office for any length of time in the face of a threatened coalition of the two bourgeois parties. Nevertheless the public feeling on the whole question of Socialism is one of enquiry and expectancy, due to a large extent to the attitude of the bourgeois and conservative element of politics which has never hesitated to denounce the Labour Movement and Labour politics as "Socialism." These tactics cannot fail to redound to the success of the Socialist principles and politics among the ranks of those who vote the cause of the Labour Movement. The political events of the past 3 years have, therefore,

given reasonable grounds for hopes that the Socialist cause may be materially extended among the working classes. We have throughout, recognised the necessity of keeping as far as possible an attitude of friendly criticism towards the Labour Movement seeing that the effect of pure Socialist opinion on current legislation is practically nil. Above all the suicidal policy of denouncing indiscriminately the aims and programme of the Labour Movement, - a course of tactics pursued by the Australian Socialist League, who represent the principle of political 'intransigence' pushed to the very extreme, has appeared to us productive of nothing more than obstruction and retrogression.

In the Northern State of Queensland, where the Labour Party is represented in the State Parliament by (23) members out of a total of 72, the Party has thought a temporary alliance with the moderate party the best course of action, though it is to be hoped that the sequence of events will lead to the formation of only two parties - that representing working class interests and that opposed to them.

In the Parliament of New South Wales where the working class Representatives comprise 24 out of 125, it has been able to bring about various more or less significant reforms among which are Factory's Act, Early Closing and Shops Act and Old Age Pensions and Womanhood Suffrage, the latter the product of the last three years.

In Victoria, public opinion has been effectually aroused by the disastrous failure of the Strike on the Government owned Railways and the temporary triumph of the reactionary policy, which augurs very well for the success of the advanced party at the forthcoming elections and the Labour Party in this State is sure to gain a good number of additional seats at the elections to be held in August

In Western Australia and South Australia, the Labour cause was voted by large majorities at the recent Commonwealth Elections when the working class vote was practically unanimous. The outlook for Socialism in both States is very promising, though in Western Australia an unfortunate division in the ranks of Labour promises to play into the hands of the Conservative factions at forthcoming State Elections.

Various proposals for the establishment of a newspaper press to voice the claims of Labour have been considered and in the course of a few months the working class movement will possess a powerful and effectual weapon in the form of daily newspapers in each of the various State Capitals.

Reviewing briefly the progress of the movement towards political and economic freedom in Australia it must be stated that the past three years have seen a general awakening on the part of the workers and increased interest in the principle and theory of Socialism. In the great army of toilers, who support the political Labour Movement is excellent material for the formation of a solid and uncompromising Socialist Movement, and it is for the future to give stability and direction to these forces in the trend towards Socialism, which are conspicuously discernible in the political world of Australia. It would therefore be well for the various Socialist Organisations in Australia to recognise, that their work for some years to come should be purely work of propaganda in enlightening the Trade Unionist and Non-Unionist elements, that now support the Labour Parties policy, to a true understanding of the economic conditions of a Society, supported by and based upon the exploitation of Labour power and to make clear to them that little or no amelioration of the condition of the masses can be hoped for so long as this privilege to property in and exploitation of human activities exists for a minority class.

## THE TRADES - UNION - MOVEMENT

The most important event, which illustrates best the trend of the Australian Trades-Union-Movement was the first Australian Commonwealth Trades-Union-Congress held at Sydney, New South Wales on November 14, 1902.

Delegates from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and West Australia were present. Tasmania was not represented, there being hardly any Trades-Union-Movement in that State. The delegates represented 149,000 Unionists who were affiliated with their head organisations. Besides these a number of large organised bodies, who were not affiliated were not directly represented, but it can be said that the Congress was representative of 250,000 men.

The business of the Congress was to decide on concerted action on all matters affecting labour in the State-Parliaments

### The following resolutions were carried

The introduction of a Federal Navigation Bill containing provisions for the protection of Australian shipping from the competition of foreign and British Steamers in the Coastal Trade of the Commonwealth of Australia, and the abolition of the employment of Kanakas upon Australian Steamers trading from Australian ports to the South Sea Islands.

That in the opinion of this Congress the several States of the Commonwealth should at once take steps to own and work all the mines necessary for their requirements, and Congress further strongly expresses the opinion that the whole of the coalmining industry should be nationalised and that in the meantime no further leases be granted.

That eight ours be declared a maximum day's work in all occupations where practicable, by legislative enactment.

That uniform factory legislation be introduced to provide for (a) the hours and conditions of insanitary and dangerous occupations (b) conditions of employment in the sugar industry; (c) the stamping of articles of Asiatic manufacture ; (d) a proper system of apprenticeship; (e) the payment of a living wage to juvenile workers, (f) the extension of the provisions of the Factories Act to employees engaged in hotels and restaurants.

That steps be taken to bring about the introduction of the Trade-Union Label throughout the Commonwealth.

That each State Government should undertake the construction of railway carriages, tram cars, waggons, locomotives, and where practicable other supplies required by the States.

That it be a recommendation to the Federal and State Governments and local governing bodies that a clause be inserted in all contracts providing for payment of Union wages and conditions of labour in all contracts, and that any employer who may be found guilty of subletting or conducting his business under the sweating system be debarred from all further contracts.

That this Congress urges the various State Legislatures to pass an Act providing fair compensation for injuries arising in all industrial occupations.

That Congress urge that a compulsory Arbitration or Wages Board Act be passed by each State which has not already done so and that a Federal Commonwealth Arbitration Act be made to deal with disputes extending beyond the limits of one State with a due regard to the different conditions in the States.

That the adult age limit respecting the engagement or dismissal of Government employees be abolished.

That all Government work be carried out by day labour.

That this Congress affirms the advisability of legislation being introduced with a view to the extension of full citizen rights to all State employees and we condemn the proposal of any State Government to give separate representation to Civil Servants.

The establishment of Labour Bureaux for males and females.

That this Congress recognising the justice of land value taxation, recommends that action be taken to secure uniform taxation on this basis in every State.

That the Congress is of opinion that the judgement in the Taff Vale Case is an infringement of the Trade Union rights, and requests the Labour Members of all State Parliaments with other Liberal Members, to have passed as early as possible a Bill to exempt Trade Unions, Members of Trade-Unions, and Trade Union Officials from the operation of such judgement.

That the liquor traffic be nationalized.

That Congress strongly urge upon the Trade Unionists of the Commonwealth the desirability of purchasing all the necessaries of life upon purely co-operative principles.

Steps were taken to establish a permanent Committee, to keep the different State Committees in communication with one another during interims between the Congresses.

It is only of late years, that Trades Unionists are directing their attention to political action, the Unions through their Labour Councils moving more and more politically, and it is for Socialists to take advantage of this and lead them in the right direction.