

BOSSES SPECULATE AT WORKERS' EXPENSE

IN spite of the pleas of aero magnates in the national press for the formation of plans on production of post-war aircraft, production throughout the whole of the aircraft industry is steadily declining, and consequently many thousands of aero workers are, in one way or another, finding themselves on the dole. Over a period of months the steady dribble of workers from aero works has assumed great proportions. "Redundant" workers from the West of England Bristol Aircraft factories are now swelling the figures of the wartime unemployed. Figures of unemployed which are largely drawn from engineering and shipbuilding industries and amount to many thousands of skilled workers, the B.A.C. workers are viewing with extreme alarm the huge number of their ex-work-mates who are already kicking their heels outside the Nelson Street Labour Exchange.

Here, in Bristol, a face-saving dodge has been adopted by the bosses of the B.A.C., for instead of the direct sacking of workers, they have resorted to the tactic of transferring workers to out of the way dispersal points, many miles from their homes. When the worker protests, and even asks the transfer, because of added expense and inconvenience, he or she is told that they are redundant at their original works and the workers' release is applied for on these grounds. This method of indirect sacking becomes more and more obvious when a particularly remote dispersal point, which is known to be closing down

AT the end of August this year, the workers of the Ministry of Supply Factory, Dalnair, were informed that the factory would cease to be operated by William Beardmore & Co., Ltd. as Agents for the Ministry of Supply, and would again be operated as a Royal Ordnance Factory. In a notice to all industrial employees issued on 13th October, 1944 it was stated:—

"It has been agreed with the Headquarters Trade Unions represented on the Ministry of Supply Joint Industrial Council that, in order to meet the Trade Union side time to consider the proposals of the Official side for bringing R.O.F., Dalnair, within existing agreements common to Royal Ordnance Factories (Engineering), no general changes will be made in gradings or systems of remuneration before Saturday, 18th November, 1944."

On Friday 3rd November a meeting of day-shift workers was held in the Factory Canteen, and arrangements were made for a meeting of the night-shift workers later in the evening. The meetings were held in agreement with the management, with the object of bringing Official Trade Union pressure on recalcitrant workers.

Although they were visibly affected by the cold reception of the workers, the depiction by means of an impressive lateness, an imposing file of papers, a deliberate manner, and pompous address, endeavoured to create an awestricken atmosphere.

Mr. Harrison, chairman of the M.O.S. Joint Industrial Council, presided, and was assiduously assisted by Bro. Nabbi, C.P. convener of the factory. They were supported on the platform by representatives of other trade unions, including Mr. Maloney of the A.E.U.

Mr. Harrison, in the course of his address, referred to the serious situation which confronted the workers, and expressed his regret that it was his duty to inform the workers of the new conditions under which they would be compelled to work, when the R.O.F. management took over on the 18th November. These conditions were not subject to negotiation, they were the decision of the M.O.S. whose over-ruling

Bosses Speculate at Workers' Expense

War time conditions on Railways

It has been noticeable in the past few weeks that writers in the trade journals when discussing the terrific amount of rail traffic that is commonplace today, invariably refer to the "resilience of the British Railways". Of course, this is not intended as a compliment to the stakhanovite efforts of the railway workers but rather as a cheap advertisement for British locomotives and rolling-stock.

During the past few months in order to allow war materials to pass unhampered, passenger services have been reduced and the amount of comfort decreased. But in spite of this it is estimated that the total number of passengers is greater than ever. This problem had a simple solution. Passengers were allowed to stand, so that we find that some trains have carried up to

Redundant Workers

shortly, is used as a means of declaring protesting workers to be redundant. There is also reason to suspect that militant trade-unions are being weeded out of the B.A.C. by this method, and in common with other parts of the country, dilutees are being retained while skilled men are getting the push, women being kept in preference to men. In other words, "reliable" workers, from the boss's point of view are being hand-picked for saddling the aero industry with the inevitably depressed post-war conditions and accepting this passively. A drive to sack workers on the inspection department at the Filton works

altered. They were faced with an irrevocable decision. The meeting was then open for questions. No discussion was allowed, and it was pointed out that no decision could be taken as it was not a full mass meeting of the workers of the factory.

A question regarding the retention of personnel, and the new working hours was answered by the Chairman. He admitted that he had avoided referring to the matter, but did not want to confuse the workers on the issue before them. However, since the question was raised he would deal with it. Regarding redundancy, there were 400 to 600 passengers in the factory. These were surplus to factory requirements and would have to go. He enumerated the reductions that would be necessary, and stated that these reductions would be offset, but not to a great extent, by the proposed new working hours. There would be two shifts of 47 hours. One hour on each shift would be allowed for meals, and an additional allowance of 10 minutes would be granted to women workers on the night-shift.

The women workers, in the meantime, would continue to have the same rates as at present in force, namely the same rates as male employees. The tea breaks would be abolished. A question was asked as to the use, by the representative of what claimed to be one of the most powerful unions in the country, of the word irrevocable. The chairman contradicted all that he had previously said by stating that the word was used to mean that the decision of the Treasury was irrevocable from the management's point of view, not from their point of

view. A worker stated that if this dictation was an example of what we were fighting for, we were fighting the war in vain. The chairman declared that the workers were responsible for the kind of government that they now had, and were themselves responsible for the Treasury. Shouts of disagreement greeted this nonsense.

Another worker suggested that they could open negotiations with the Treasury. In answer Mr. Maloney said that he could take the suggestion to his Executive, but he could not and would be failing in his duty to the workers if he did, hold out any hope of success.

Another worker asked if it was the case, that the organisation which the workers had labouriously built up to defend their wages and conditions, had now come to them to admit failure. That in fact, they should do nothing for the workers. A number of admissions "That is so", "That is the position", "That is the case", came in chorus from the platform.

A worker rising in the middle of the hall, stated that in 37 years of working class struggle he could not recall such a vile sell-out of the workers as he was now witnessing. The chairman jumped to his feet to deny the accusation, and after a poor attempt at justification he concluded lamely "we have nothing to sell." Needless to say the workers agreed with him. Like the Communist Shop Stewards of the factory, the T.U. leaders now find themselves with nothing left to sell. *Consummatum est*, or if you gentle readers were too busy working to study Latin, the dirty work is completed.

R. O. F.

Manchester Gas Strike

36 Men Fined Ten Pounds Each

IN the April issue of *War Commentary* we reported a strike of the Manchester Gas Workers. Troops maintained the gas supply to that the strike ended within a few days. The strikers followed the advice of their union leaders and submitted their claim to arbitration.

As a result they were awarded the insulting sums of 1d. per hour increase with 2d. per hour for night shift workers. The decision of the strikers was influenced to a large extent by the intensive sub-stuff propaganda campaign which filled the national press. However, as we pointed out at that time, the public and the strikers "do not seem to realize that bread could be baked, major operations carried out, gas fires operating again as soon as the employers gave in also."

At a meeting on Saturday night Nov. 2nd at the Bradford Road gasworks, the men decided, with few dissentients, to carry out strike action once again on virtually the same issue. A hundred men were directly involved and 600 indirectly. The men were striking for time- and one-third pay for night work. The strike was planned to commence on the night shift of Nov. 4th. As no worker turned up for the 10 p.m. shift their places were filled by a lorry load of troops complete with tin hats and rifles (one wonders why they needed also rifles when they came to work—surely the fear of invasion is past?). A peculiarity of this strike was that in the beginning it merely affected night workers.

On Tuesday November 7th the day shift workers came out in solidarity. They numbered 80 men in all. As a result they were awarded a large extent by the intensive sub-stuff propaganda campaign which filled the national press. However, as we pointed out at that time, the public and the strikers "do not seem to realize that bread could be baked, major operations carried out, gas fires operating again as soon as the employers gave in also."

of the B.A.C. by the management, has been postponed by the awareness of the militant workers on the job, and they have ensured that no more transfers will be effected pending the whole position being reviewed by a workers conference. Of course, the effect of such a works conference, at the very best, can only be to stop these practices temporarily. Sooner or later the fundamental issue involved will prevent the continuance of such temporary measures.

Some writers openly advocate the restarting of competition, so-called, or trade warfare, with the American aircraft industry. They claim that America has had a flying start on Britain and has already captured a large percentage of the aero-market and also established a control in air travel. In such a period of relentless competition, the forcing down of production costs (i.e. workers wages and conditions of labour) becomes a primary necessity. The large number of unemployed aero-workers who were engaged on war-production will be used as a threat, against protesting workers who are attempting to merely hang on to their meagre wages and to prevent the worsening of their working conditions. Aero-workers must bear in mind that there is no satisfactory solution to their particular problems short of the abolition of the private ownership of the aircraft industry, and the competition with all other industries, of control of production by the workers. In a word, syndicalism—the workers control of production.

Age Cuts at Dalnair

as Government again takes over factory

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R. O. F.

Victory in the Fight Against Class Domination Can Only Be Achieved by the Direct Action of the Workers Themselves.

WE REJECT ALL PARLIAMENTARY AND SIMILAR ACTIVITY AS DEFLECTING THE WORKERS FROM THE CLASS STRUGGLE INTO PATHS OF CLASS COLLABORATION.

(IWMA) The difficulties of communication with our comrades in Italy are still great, but the secretariat of the IWMA have obtained a fairly accurate picture of our organisational position in that country.

All sources of information coincide in one fact—the Italian workers are fighting against enormous odds, primarily because the great industrial centres of the north are still under Nazi control and syndicalist activities will only be able to develop on a large scale when the region has been liberated, and secondly because the activities of the Allied administration (AMG) are a definite hindrance to the development of strong working class organisations.

A trade union congress held in Rome recently decided to separate the unions from politics. It was emphasised that the unions should be separate from the political parties, and from the state. The declaration of the congress stated that the resolution must be exhibited in the premises of the unions nor at any public meetings organised by the unions. It is difficult to determine whether this resolution—in its rather abstract form—is influenced by revolutionary syndicalism. It is probable that its origin was of a very different character—the attempt to unite the reformist and Christian unions into one organisation. Information received via London declares that the attitude of the congress was approved by the socialists, communists and Christian democrats. If this is true, the resolution must be considered as a concession to the Christian unions which do not desire to collaborate with any working-class party. In short, it means opposition to the socialist movement.

The communists have presented themselves as the defenders of a united front with the Christians—in this case the Catholics. Collaboration is no longer a means but an end for the communists. In a conference on "Unity of Action" with the Catholics, the Italian Communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, said: "We know that in the past there were psychological and organisational obstacles which impeded this unity of action. We have done everything to destroy those obstacles. We have declared in the name of the Communist Party, and I want to repeat it, here in Rome, the capital of the Catholic world, that we respect the Catholic faith as the traditional religion of the majority of the Italian people. As we approach the representatives of the Catholics we beg them to create our own faith, our own pact."

The U.S.I. (Unione Sindacale Italiana) is also again active. Their activities are increasing greatly and the attempts at infiltration of the movement by the Catholic elements seeking to dominate the organisation has been fought with good results. Our Italian comrades are also represented in the Committees of Liberation where they are highly respected for their proven anti-fascist activity.

From other sources we learn that the Federation of Sea-going Workers, affiliated to the U.S.I., is also active, and sections are being organised in all the harbours of the peninsula.

In Naples a libertarian paper was in the course of preparation, and the first number must have, by now, appeared. For this purpose the Italian syndicalists have received economic help from the Spanish movement thus prove their internationalist and internationalist (Continued on p. 2)

How the American Workers Live

An article in *The Industrial Worker* for Aug. 26th gives some very interesting figures which point out how the majority of the American workers live. Two studies in the cost of living have been prepared, one by the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics which deals with a bare subsistence living standard for father, mother and two children; the other is by the Heller Committee for Research in Social Sciences at the University of California and deals with a minimum standard of living. The Heller Committee's standard is based on health and efficiency, \$2,665 a year, or \$50.80 (£12 14s. 0d.) a week—less than the minimum standard.

Senator Harley M. Kilgore, pointed out how harsh is the standard of the B.L.S. budget. *The Industrial Worker* reports:— "The housewife, of course, must do all home work, including washing, cooking, baking and mending. She must feed her family on a food allotment of 14 cents a meal per person—less than half the cost of a working day's wages. The food allowance is substantially the same as is available to Germans at the present time under war conditions.

The father can buy a suit of clothes once every three years, a pair of pyjamas once every two years and one pair of shoes once a year. The mother can buy a woolly dress every two years, a coat every three years and a dressing gown every ten years.

Growing boys get a suit every two years and growing girls a rayon dress every two years.

Even Health is Rationed

Less than one dollar a week is available for household essentials; medical expenses cannot exceed \$16.50 (£4 2s. 6d.) per person a year, and that must cover the cost of dental care, emergency operations, care of the teeth, hospital bills, medicines, drugs and eyeglasses. The family may "squander" \$1.70 (68d.) a week on recreation, which includes newspapers and magazines, cigarettes or smoking tobacco, candy, etc., and 12 cents a week per person for movies and other recreation.

That does not seem a very cheerful state of affairs, even if workers got the necessary wage, and the fact is that nearly 18,000,000 workers live below the Heller Committee's minimum standard, while 25,000,000 workers earn less than the University of California budget. Out of over 27½ million workers, only 2 million more than the working class to provide "minimum health and efficiency".

It is worth while to notice that while the University standard is much more generous than the B.L.S. budget, it still falls far below the minimum standard. There is no talk of drawing up a budget to show what is necessary for maximum health and efficiency. But if that was done it would show that the working class members of the working class got that sort of wage. The best things are reserved for the capitalist class under the present system, including health—which should be the right of every one.

ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS

3. Germany

ALREADY in 1917 the Germany Navy, after the first Wilhelmshaven Mutiny, which ended in failure and the execution of two mutineers showed signs of infection. Secret councils were maintained by the rank and file on nearly all vessels; the struggle was carried out by underground methods and a close watch was kept on the officers.

In January 1918 great strikes were held in Berlin and Leipzig, in which two hundred thousand workers took part. They demanded better rations, peace without annexations and universal suffrage; and as a result of the strike a co-ordinated revolutionary shop-stewards' organization began to develop to a certain extent. The January strikes were backed by all German working class organizations though the Spartacists were not represented on the strike committees, because they desired to give the movement a definite revolutionary character.

In the factories, the representatives of the trade unions formed the nucleus of the future Workers' Councils.

Ludendorff, still sure of the Army at that time, was forced by the strikes to declare a state of siege under martial law. Strike leaders were arrested, thousands of strikers were ordered to join the army, and, once they became soldiers under army law had to resume factory work immediately. Thus the great factories were placed under direct military control.

The events in Russia began to infect the German Army increasingly. Hundreds of thousands deserted. The Spartacist League held a joint conference with the Left-wing Radicals in October 1918, when it was decided to begin an intensive agitation among the troops and to organize at once the formation of workers', peasants', and soldiers' soviets.

On the 8th November 1918, the second naval mutiny broke out spontaneously in Kiel. The governor of Kiel was forced to resign and Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets then took over the town. One hundred thousand mutinous soldiers and sailors formed soviets all over Germany. On 9th November, the soviets elected in factories and barracks formed their executive committee of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, claiming full power throughout the Reich. The prisons were stormed and the political prisoners released.

Britain at once declared her refusal to recognize the congress of soviets. On 10th November Ebert was made head of the Government by the Congress of Workers' Soldiers' and Peasants' Soviets. Soviets rose up in all industrial towns where the masses themselves took the initiative. Later, however, they were re-formed by the German Labour Party and were then no longer the real organ of the masses.

100,000 Workers Demonstrate

Rosa Luxemburg presented the demands of the Spartacists to the public. She denounced the parliamentary system and with the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" as the only revolutionary alternative, she appealed to the workers to arm themselves. The attitude of the soldiers who supported the soviets forced the High Command (led by Hindenburg and Ludendorff) to place itself at the disposal of the Ebert Government, which had already begun sabotaging the efforts of the workers' movements which had placed it in power, and was collaborating with the forces of reaction.

On 6th December the Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet Committee was arrested by soldiers who were Nationalist and loyal to the Ebert Government. These soldiers also occupied the office and printing plant of the *Red Flag* (the *Red Flag*, Luxemburg's paper). A protest demonstration of soldiers in Berlin was crushed and a number of them were killed and wounded.

The Headquarters of the counter-revolution was the Berlin Commandant's Office, the War Ministry and the Foreign Office. Directed from these places, a wave of white terror now broke loose among the workers. One hundred thousand workers demonstrated in protest. Strikes broke out everywhere.

The Ebert Government had them crushed by the military forces of the reactionary white generals, but the Soldiers' Soviet Councils which opened on 16th December demanded liquidation of the old officers' corps, lock, stock and barrel. This Congress was out-manoeuvred by Ebert. There were 306 councils in the Congress, demanding that the army should be controlled by the Soviets. But Hindenburg's position was strong enough to allow himself to ignore the demands of the workers and soldiers. The Labour Party meanwhile had successfully infiltrated the councils and won a decisive victory over the revolutionary minority. With the establishment of the National Assembly, the Soviet Congress lost its significance. The counter-revolution launched one blow after another against the revolution.

Greener, the War Minister, detested the Soldier and Worker Soviets and all that they implied. Ebert, who "hated social revolution more than sin" feared a left wing drive, and his fear

made him a mere instrument in the hands of Greener and the General Staff.

The Marine-division, in sympathy with the militant workers and opposed to the Ebert Government, was ruthlessly butchered. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered and the Spartacist rising trampled down.

The Second Soviet Congress (April 1919) demanded with a majority the release of the imprisoned I.L.P. man, Ledebour. But the Labour Party, allied with the reactionaries against the Left, ignored the demand. The Labour Party paper *Vorwärts*—(*Forward*), edited by Ebert, Noske and Scheideман called the demand of the Congress an "interference with justice which must protect the existing lawful order." When the Soviets later demanded that the Soviets should control the Reich's defence ministry, Noske said: "The Congress may express its wishes to the National Assembly. I am democrat enough to accept that. But if the Assembly agrees to their demand I shall resign." Which meant that the Ebert Government would lose the protection of the reactionary Generals and their nationalist Free Corps. Under Noske's command General Maerker occupied Brunswick with armoured trains, heavy guns and flame throwers. He declared a state of siege and courts-martial, dismissed the Brunswick Government, dissolved the Soviets and disbanded the people's Marine-division and Home Guard, both formed by the workers. With the crushing of the Brunswick and Munich Soviet Republics, the German Revolution was defeated, and the Counter-Revolution (arm-in-arm with the Labour Party) was established anew.

The political result of the civil war waged by Noske, "the Bloodhound" in the first half of 1919, was the total destruction of the political power of the Soviets. The disarmament of the working class was carried out systematically and with the greatest thoroughness by the Nationalist military force. By the middle of the year the real power was in the hands of the Free Corps and counter-revolutionary General Staff and was no longer with the Assembly.

4. Conclusion

The Bolsheviks in Russia and the Labour Party in Germany both frustrated the constructive revolutionary development of the Soviet system. In both countries the working-class movements failed. Every moment they left the initiative to the political parties. In Russia and Germany the power-seeking parties used the same tactics: existing Soviets were infiltrated and new soviets formed by party members, thus securing a party majority in the Congress of Soviets. In Germany the delegates of the Congress were subordinate to the Assembly, in which the Labour Party coalesced with the bourgeoisie to obtain a majority against the revolutionary Left. In Russia the Congress was brought under the exclusive control of the Bolsheviks.

In 1917 only after the Russian peasants began to expropriate the land on their own account and the local peasants' soviets proclaimed that all land was to be handed over to the Land Committee; and only after the workers took to direct action, did the Congress of Soviets under Trotsky claim all power. In Germany it was only after the mutineers established soviets that the Labour Party proclaimed the Republic. The Congress failed because it did not inspire the workers to take over immediate control of industry, nor did it urge the peasants to appropriate the big estates, nor advise the soldiers to remain under arms at the disposal of the revolution, at the same time taking over the administration of the army. Private property was not abolished. Police, judiciary state institutions, schools, etc., were left unaffected. Mortgages, shares and agreements were left unchallenged, the gold of the Reichsbank untouched.

With the election of the pseudo-Socialist Ebert as head of the Government the Congress condemned itself to utter impotence. In Germany the majority of the united Labour Party and counter-revolutionary parties (as in Russia, the Bolshevik majority) imposed its will and control upon the Congress. The local soviets were held back from their social revolutionary mission and then side-tracked into insignificant activities.

Counter-Revolution at Work

When the revolutionary anti-parliamentary and anti-party-dictatorship minorities—in Russia, the Kronstadt sailors and workers; in Germany, the anarcho-syndicalists and Spartacists—objected to the deceptive manipulations of the reformists allying themselves with the counter-revolution, they were ruthlessly liquidated. In Germany the Labour Party gave the Whittier Generals a free hand to slaughter the militants by the hundred thousand. Similarly, Trotsky in Russia, after the intervention, employed arch-counter-revolutionaries and notorious Jew-baiters such as General Slaskhev-Krimsky, to butcher the Anarchists and Social Revolutionaries.

The natural programme of the Social Revolution was carried out by the masses only to a certain extent: the overthrow of

the old régime, the break-up of the old army system, the arming of the people and the setting up of soviets—these were all effected. In Russia and Germany we find a few revolutionaries, on the eve of the outbreak of the revolution organizing secret councils in industry, agriculture and the army. Their revolutionary propaganda had one aim: preparation for revolt. In clear and telling slogans, which soldiers, workers and peasants appreciated and related to their own lives, the ideas of Social Revolution were spread. Close contacts were established between army and civilians, thus preparing for the necessary fraternization. Clubs and rest-places were organized; and lively correspondences were cultivated between the revolutionary groups and tent with conditions of service under the old régime was exploited, by showing how in a different society such grievances would be minimized and would finally wither away. The revolutionary propaganda made definite attempts to convert the discontent of the forces to social revolutionary ingredients. When the discontent and disillusion had at length culminated in serious disaffection, desertions increased alarmingly. As was pointed out in a recent article "How Wars End" this was not the result entirely of revolutionary propaganda but also a natural reaction to a long drawn-out war. But revolutionary propaganda doubtless influenced the soldiers not to fire upon their comrades in the streets on being ordered, but to go over to the side of the demonstrators.

Revolutionary propaganda was also responsible for the formation of soviets, the arrest of officers, confiscation of stores and administrative offices, occupation of strategic strongholds, freeing of political prisoners and comrades in detention camps, etc. In Russia and Germany the revolutionary propaganda had succeeded so far. It did not, however, influence the working class to carry the struggle to its logical conclusion.

As far back as the Congress of Saint-Imier, the Anarchists have stated and since then repeated again and again: "The have stated and since then repeated again and again: 'The economic aspirations of the proletariat can have no other aim than the establishment of an absolutely free economic organization and federation independent of any political government. Such organization and federation must be the result of the voluntary action of the proletariat itself, the soviets and the autonomous communes.'

"Every political organization is nothing but an organization of rulers for the benefit of one class and the deprivation of the masses. If the proletariat should achieve power, it would immediately degenerate into a ruling and exploiting class.

"The first duty of the insurgent proletariat is the complete destruction of ALL political power. Any organizing of a so-called provisional revolutionary political power is only a new deception and is for the Revolution as dangerous as any existing Government."

The proletariat must reject all compromises and bourgeois policy and carry through the Social Revolution. The soviets, formed at the place of work, controlled from below, are the only social revolutionary weapon by which the revolutionary impulse of the masses can destroy the class society and establish the free anarchist international.

MICHAEL PETERSON.

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The Revolutionary Movement in Italy (cont. from p. 1 col. 5)

(continued from p. 1)
 The Italian comrades are in urgent need of economic solidarity from the international movement.

Italian syndicalists and anarchists in Tunis, North Africa, began the publication of a bulletin, LUCE NUOVA, at the beginning of this year, and we have received some numbers of this.

We are also glad to notify comrades all over the world that the widow of the Italian militant, Camillo Berneri, is well and safe. Berneri was one of the finest militants of the Italian movement. He was assassinated by the communists during the Spanish civil war. His wife lived as a refugee in France, from where, after the occupation of the Midi by the Germans, she was handed over, together with other libertarian militants to the Italian authorities. She is now free and living in Naples where, as always, she works for our ideals.

Another well known Italian comrade, Celso Persici, who belonged to the foreign committee of the U.S.I. is also safe. During the Spanish war he worked together with Soucy and Goudell in the foreign propaganda offices of the C.N.T. in Barcelona. He is now in Africa and writes that he is waiting impatiently for the day when he will be able to return to Italy to work for our organisation and continue the struggle for the triumph of our ideals.

Many militants of our revolutionary syndicalist movement have met their deaths during the horrible events of the past years. But the situation tends to improve; many militants who were able to save their lives are now intensifying their uninterupted activities, are re-establishing contact with the international movement and taking their places of combat, propaganda and organisation as previously.

They haven't forgotten the I.W.M.A., and this is promising for our movement everywhere.

JOHN ANDERSON.

The Workers Struggle in Belgium

THE struggle between the State and the armed people continues in France. Now the same struggle is in the forefront in Belgium. The Pictet Government ordered the underground forces to surrender their arms by Saturday, November 18th, but they are resisting, and organising demonstrations against the government's decree. A correspondent in *Reynolds' News* remarks: "I have talked to many in the Resistance Movement, particularly in Brussels. They maintain that the Government's decision to disarm them was inspired by the big industrialists. Belgian Big Business sees in an armed resistance an ever-present threat of social revolution." The leader writer in the same issue also draws attention to this struggle of the dual power. "The Pictet Government," he writes, "seems more anxious to purge the patriots than the collaborators—and to call in British troops to help it. The British Liberation Army is not on the Continent to buttress policies such as this."

We are not so sure. Churchill and Roosevelt have repeatedly shown themselves to be on the side of governments rather than the people—on the side of order, as they call it, against 'anarchy'. We are emphatically on the other side, that of the armed workers. And we repeat again what we said in our last issue—"Hold on to your rifles!"

As we go to press, it is reported that the "crisis in Brussels is over", the Resistance leaders having agreed to surrender their weapons to the British military authorities (so the British Liberation Army has certain political uses, after all!) As in France, therefore, the "leaders" have betrayed the rank and file of the people in arms. Whether these will comply with the new agreement remains to be seen. Our advice still stands.

Are you doing your bit for the Press Fund?

(See page 4 Col. 5)

PAGES OF LABOUR HISTORY

BLACK FRIDAY AND AFTER

IN the first of these articles we showed how, when the elementary principles of labour solidarity are carried out, the workers can resist the assembled might of the employing class and its government, win a strike and stave off a general assault on wages, and that in a very short time. This article has a very different lesson to point—how a trusted leadership can betray its followers and the disasters which follow from that betrayal.

On this occasion the miners were chosen as the first objective of the capitalist attack. The so-called post-war boom was fading by the beginning of 1921 and it was soon evident that the employing class would take advantage of any labour slump to attack wages. Coal was one of the earliest commodities to show a decrease in market value, largely due to the policy of "making Germany pay" 48 coal.

The miners' national "demon line" agreement was due to expire on March 31, 1921 and negotiations between the Miners' Federation and the coalowners were going on when the Government suddenly announced its intention to terminate direct control of the mines five months earlier than by law prescribed. A full scale attack by the owners and the Government upon the miners was now clearly revealed. The *Demonstrator*, 1921, was passed and became law on March 24, 1921. On March 31, 1921 the miners were locked out.

War Upon Labour

The coal owners' terms were savage. The national agreements were to be abolished and replaced by district agreements. Wages rates were to be those of 1914 plus 20 per cent. cost of living bonus, although the Government cost of living index showed prices to be 141 per cent. above 1914. Wage cuts were as much as £2 a week in some cases.

The Miners' Federation stood firm against all cuts and against district agreement. In reply to the owners' statement that different districts had varying degrees of prosperity, the miners proposed a tonnage levy on coal to create a "National Pool" that the wealthy districts might subsidise the poorer coalfields.

The Government wanted no time on police ex-

changes. The Emergency Powers Act was invoked. The Government polished up its road transport strike-breaking plan. Troops were sent to the big industrial districts, while machine guns and armoured cars threatened the mining areas. A special Defence Force of ex-soldiers was raised, armed and sent to "guard the pits". It is worthwhile turning from the main course of our story here to relate that many miners, whose ranks contained a very high percentage of ex-soldiers, joined the new Defence Force and straightaway fraternised with their mates. So fragile a weapon did the Force prove to be that the Government after a while disbanded it and never repeated the experiment.

"An Injury to One —"

The stoppage of work in the mines was almost 100 per cent. effective, even the pump and other safety men leaving the pits after being given notice by the owners. The miners looked to their allies in the working class to aid them. Their hope seemed justified, for the attack threatened extension to the whole of the working class. Very early in 1921 the *Daily Herald* under George Lansbury's able management began an intensive campaign to arouse the workers to an awareness of this threat. We are far from agreement with the politics of the *Daily Herald* even those days, but let us give credit where it is due; Lansbury's paper played a brave and worthy part in a struggle in which so many prominent public figures brought lasting shame upon themselves.

Even before the miners were attacked the *Herald* cried every day, "It's your wages they're after!" Every day they warned the workers of the coming general attack upon wages. The message to the readers of the paper alone was the message to the workers to every passer-by in the industrial areas. One could see what a working class newspaper could be; not merely a retailer of news, but a leader and organiser of class struggle. How different to the strike-breaking *Daily Worker* of to-day!

The miners, too, were still members of the Triple Alliance, to whose other components, the National Union of Railwaymen and the Transport Workers' Federation, they looked for promised assistance. The rail and transport

unions replied by ordering a general transport strike of rail, road and docks to begin at midnight on Tuesday, April 12.

Treachery Afoot

Although the union leaders had issued the strike call they appeared to have little stomach for the fight. All day and every day they attempted to have negotiations reopened. To this end they persuaded the Miners' Federation to have the safety men return to the pits. This brought the miners and the Government together on the morning of Tuesday the 12th and the strike was postponed to Friday the 15th.

Treachery was taking shape. On the night of Thursday the 14th Frank Hodges, Secretary of the Miners' Federation spoke to an unofficial committee of M.P.'s, mostly Tories with a few National Liberals in the House of Commons. Hodges made the speech without permission of his organisation and without even notifying his colleagues. Hodges proposed a scheme for a temporary settlement of the dispute, which the E.C. members of the M.P.G.B. considered involved district settlements and wage cuts.

The committee of M.P.'s sent the scheme to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George. The E.C. of the miners, meeting next day, repudiated Hodges and censured him for acting without permission of the Federation.

Black Friday

This incident was seized by the leaders of the rail and transport unions as a pretext for calling off the strike. On Friday the 15th they were in session at the headquarters of the N.U.R. Unity House in Euston Road. In the afternoon of that fateful day they concocted their sorry tale that as the miners had refused an opportunity of settlement they would cancel the strike orders due to be carried out that night.

At three o'clock J. H. Thomas, Secretary of the N.U.R. rushed down the steps of Unity House crying to the crowd of reporters, "The strike is off". Just that. Black Friday for the miners. Black Friday for all British workers.

Dismay and bewilderment swept Labour's ranks. The leaders of the betrayal were publicly cursed, but without alternative method of

leadership the damage was done without hope of repair.

Chief organisers of Black Friday were J. H. Thomas, Secretary of the N.U.R. and Bob Williams, Secretary of the Transport Workers Federation. The cult of personal leadership was to blame. Foolish to condemn "right wing" leadership and replace it by "left wing" leadership. J. H. Thomas was the principal right wing leader; Bob Williams was a national executive committee member of the Communist Party. Reformist or "revolutionary", faith in leaders had let us down, and there was no revolutionary rank and file movement able to develop an alternative to personal leadership.

After Black Friday

The pages of union journals and conference reports of this period are full of inquests on the betrayal, but in none of them can any regret by any of the principals be found. Bevin, one of the principals, declared, at the Transport Workers' Federation Conference in June 1921, that if he had to live Black Friday over again he would repeat his action.

The miners carried on the fight for three months and were defeated, having to accept only slightly lesser wage cuts, but saving part of the principle of national agreements. Then the storm burst upon the rest of the working class and each section was forced to accept or fight alone.

Shipyard men and engineers, seamen, builders, textile workers, transport workers, railway clerks, municipal workers, almost every branch of industry suffered wage cuts. Some took several successive cuts and at last fought a cornered fight. Such was the case of the engineers, who, after several cuts, were locked out and defeated in 1922 their wages being reduced to £2 16s. a week in most districts and even to £2 7s. in one. Disillusion spread. Trade union membership fell by over two millions. Let us remember the defeat of all that comes from allowing one section to be defeated. Let us, too, remember that only too often an attack on the miners is the herald of an attack upon all.

TOM BROWN

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