

INTERNATIONAL

COUNCIL

CORRESPONDENCE

For Theory and Discussion

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CORRESPONDENCE

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The period of progressive capitalist development is historically closed. The decline period of capital, a permanent condition of crisis, compels to ever greater convulsions of economy, to new imperialistic and military conflicts, to ever increasing unemployment and to general and absolute impoverishment of the workers. Thus is given the objective situation for the communist revolution in the capitalist countries. For the working class, there is only the revolutionary way out, which leads to the communist society. No one can deprive the workers of this task, which must be carried out by the class itself.

The publishers of Council Correspondence see in the acting self-initiative of the workers and in the growth of their self-consciousness the essential advance of the labor movement. We therefore combat the leadership policy of the old labor movement, and call upon the workers to take their fate in their own hands, to set aside the capitalist mode of production and themselves to administer and direct production and distribution in accordance with social rules having universal validity. As a fighting slogan and statement of goal we propose:

All power to the workers' councils! The means of production in the hands of the Workers!

ELECTION YEAR

1.

It has long since been recognized that one capitalist kills many, but under the Roosevelt regime the matter has been subject to fantastic complications. The small capitalists on their way to extinction attribute to Roosevelt the design of bringing all private property under state control. A part of the big bourgeoisie feels called upon to exert an oppositional pressure in order to force the Administration more in its own direction. These attacks from the side of certain capitalist strata furnish occasion for the bureaucratic-liberalistic elements to support Roosevelt in his "fight against the money bags". Meanwhile, the truly dominant capitalist element goes calmly about its affairs, and while on the one hand eliminating the scurvy competition, at the same time hits upon measures for providing the government with instruments for use against the workers. The middle class, the workers and the small capitalists are continually confusing friend and foe, and the horde of political hacks here at work not only lives on this general confusion, but makes it still greater. The apparently liberalistic, class-conciliating Roosevelt program, once enacted into law, is promptly declared unconstitutional and practically given up. The Supreme Court has apparently more power than the Administration and Congress put together, which willingly bow to its dictatorship. The Administration has in this way kept

a large number of its promises, without being obliged to suffer the disappointments of seeing them realized. The comedians of the "New Deal" play their parts splendidly; their demagogy serves skillfully to veil the fact that what passes for enmity between the Administration and the Supreme Court is merely a matter of one hand washing the other.

The Supreme Court takes its stand on the Constitution, which in general has now become quite popular. All the reactionary elements rush to the defense of that venerable document, which can be twisted to serve any interest and which by no means stands in the way of the interests of monopoly. Governor Landon, the most colorless of the presidential candidates and whose animal seriousness remains in full force regardless of all his wheeling the baby carriage, says quite correctly that "the American constitution was devised exclusively for protecting the interests of minorities against unreasonable majorities"; a trait which it shares with all constitutions, and no other sort of constitution is even conceivable. Any change of the constitution can only be a legal modification for assuring more intensified exploitation and is of interest to no one except the exploiters. Whatever the bourgeoisie may have in mind doing with their constitution cannot be other than a matter of indifference to the workers.

The greater the degree in which the control of economy has to be centralized and the greater the degree in which Capital and State are merged into a unity, the more vigorous must be the protest of the forgotten men and the more sharply rages the struggle for the influential posts in the governmental machine; though the same tasks and possibilities are given to and imposed upon each of the competing groups, until this competitive struggle sinks out of sight in the framework of the Totalitarian State. The struggle among the political trucksters for the State positions becomes mixed up so much with the actual conflicts of the various capitalist groups of interests that none of the participants really knows any more what he is actually saying.

The Roosevelt Administration, being hell-bent for reelection, promises each of the special groups what is of use to the group, without regard for the fact that the party thus becomes involved in irreconcilable contradictions. To the liberal elements it promises the continuation of the deceptive, class-conciliating policy; to the workers, freedom to organize and social legislation; to the farmers, the continuation of aid to agriculture; and at the same time it calms the reactionary element with the promise of keeping the taxes as low as possible, of balancing the budget, of allowing business more elbow room, etc. These promises are no sooner made than they

are tagged by the Republicans as Fascism or Communism, tho this does not prevent the Republicans from going before the voters with practically the same program, in a somewhat different form. For the competitors are clear on the point that both, Democrats and Republicans, as in the past, so also in the near future, can only perform the same work; that in spite of all modifications determined in conformity with party needs, in the final analysis they are after all obliged to follow the economic-political necessities which automatically promote the interests of those whose interests are being promoted even today. As concerns the workers, it's Tweedledum and Tweedledee; they have no reason to be concerned about the question of which of the competing parties stands sponsor for the capitalist economy.

The chances of Roosevelt's reelection are very good. The present Administration has some decisive capitalist groups on its side, in spite of the strong capitalist propaganda against individual phases of the Roosevelt policy. Roosevelt still has behind him, without doubt, a large part of the farming element and of the middle class, and certainly the mass of the workers. This happy position of the Democrats spurs the Republicans to undertaking against Roosevelt a campaign of demagogy the like of which has rarely been seen even in the corrupt political struggles of this American scene. From the general confusion this demagogy has created a state of absolute idiocy. No one knows any more today what is right, left, up or down. Fascists fight against Fascism, communists against Communism. Politics has apparently reached the level of Gertrude Stein.

2.

But this is only apparent and represents, no doubt, a transitory stage of the socio-economic development. The truth seems rather to be that as yet the American scene is lacking in real honest-to-god fascists, tho it has a variety and profusion of half- fascists perhaps surpassing that of any other equal area of the globe. These here in the U.S.A. who would seem to be the nearest of spiritual kin to the fascists--such as the Ku Kluxers and other haters and baiters of everybody and everything "foreign"--are after all mostly lacking in one very important element: they lack the reforming, the real crusading zeal of the foreign fascists. In other words, the nearest approach to fascist material in this country is really too reactionary to qualify as such. It has all the prejudices of the fascists, but still one besides, and this one is fatal to the spiritual unity of its makeup. Our pseudo-fascists, that is, are still too strongly and strictly attached to the past and everything by which it is symbolized--laissez-faire capitalism, the Constitution, etc. They are not content with preserving capitalism ueberhaupt, but want to pre-

serve it in the one particular form to which they have always been accustomed. This is a purely petty-bourgeois phenomenon--a pseudo- or half-fascism--and limited, of course, to the more benighted strata even of the petty-bourgeoisie. It is looked upon with contempt by the more or less educated elements of this class; and it can hardly appeal to any great number of the workers, if only because these latter have suffered too much from capitalism in its present form. In short, the American "fascists" are still half-baked; they haven't yet suffered enough to have their conservatism broken; they have fallen in with only the negative or the savage aspects of fascism. They have emotions and fetishes, but no thoughts worth mentioning and no ideals. They are oriented exclusively toward the past, and insofar as they have a vision of the future it is nothing more than a distorted image of the stage on which their grandfathers strutted. They would seem to be well represented in contemporary public life by the present governor of Georgia, "Ol' Gene" Talmadge.

At the other pole we have half-fascists of a quite different sort who have taken over only the more intellectual or pretentious part of the fascist program; planned capitalist economy, "share the wealth", "Epic", incomes of \$2,000 up per year for everyone who will work, confiscation of idle mills and factories, etc., etc. These people may be found in (or recently out of) all the political parties, inclusive of those adhering to one or the other of the Internationals, tho with the possible exception of the G.O.P., which at least to all appearances is still living in the good old days of William Mc Kinley, and doesn't know or refuses to recognize that the world has ever moved since. The best and most typical representative of this category of half-fascists was no doubt the late Huey Long, who lacked, however, the fanaticism of a Hitler and the marxian (or labor) background of a Mussolini. But all in all, these people are probably doing more to promote the prospects of fascism in America than are the pure bigots of the first category, because they are more intelligent and tend to invest the popular reformist illusions with a halo of respectability.

Then, of course, there is still a third type of half-fascists, of which the Republican Party itself furnishes the most illuminating examples. They have really no respect for either half of the fascist hodge-podge; they are interested in fascism only as the lesser evil, and will wait for communism to develop before reconciling themselves to such concessions as "planned economy". They genuinely despise the mob emotions associated with fascism, but many of these people (Hearst, Hoover, et al) are themselves adepts in arousing those emotions for the protection of their own interests--appealing particularly to the prejudices of the petty-bourgeois rabble--and have

to be reckoned with in case of a real contest.

But as yet there is no fusion of the types into a single individuality such as makes the true fascist leader. And the circumstance that such a personality has not yet appeared on the American scene is only a further indication that the crisis here has not yet reached the critical point. Meanwhile the confusion will no doubt remain as great as at present; the incipient fascists will continue to fight among each other, the "communists" will go on with their projects for forming the "Farmer-Labor" party and make themselves more and more indistinguishable from the fascists and other bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, and the pot will continue to call the kettle black.

Of one thing, however, we need not entertain any doubt, and that is that there is a much closer bond of spiritual and material affinity at least among the leaders of these various categories of still only half-fascists than might appear from their calling of names and their mutual incriminations and recriminations in the course of a presidential campaign. This is sufficiently indicated by the fact that Talmadge--that staunch upholder of the Constitution--is one of the strongest friends and admirers of the late Huey Long, while Huey in turn was at least until the last year or so of his life one of the greatest admirers of Roosevelt and his break with Roosevelt had nothing to do with any disregard of the Constitution. In reality, none of them cares a hang for the Constitution except insofar as it serves the interests of the American bourgeoisie and as a symbol of its power. The great object is that of preserving capitalism; if that object can be promoted by the constitution fetishism, well and good; otherwise, the Constitution will go by the board. Talmadge is just as willing, not to say eager, to violate some parts of the Constitution--particularly the "Bill of Rights"--as Roosevelt is inclined to disregard others. The difference is largely a matter of opinion as to which parts it is most advisable to disregard or to violate at the present stage of development. The real quarrel which most of the bourgeoisie has with Roosevelt is that he is too much inclined, in its view, to conciliation and the dispensation of relief for keeping down discontent. The bourgeoisie in general feels that such a policy involves a needless drain upon its income, that the unemployed are being "spoiled" and taught to expect too much, that at least for the present its slaves can be kept in subjection more economically by the army and the police, which are being paid for the purpose anyhow.

3.

The Republican front is less unified than one would be led to think from the way it shouts. And the Democratic

Party, also, is innerly disintegrated. The fact that the various administrations tend more and more to fuse with the ruling capitalist groups and are less and less susceptible of being regarded as the executive organ of all capitalists,--such a situation splits even the old parties and leads to intensified efforts to found a new party.

The capitalist groups neglected by the Roosevelt Administration and which hitherto have backed the Democratic Party set up new organizations such as the "American Liberty League" in order to represent their interests better. In the Republican Party, the "young elements" turn against the reactionary traditions of the party in order to increase its power of competition. Groups of interests cut loose from both parties and establish contact with such skeleton organizations as already exist and which are intended to lead to a new "third party". The viability of such a new organization is, however, hindered just as much by the present relations, which are headed for dictatorship, as its formation was hitherto precluded by the previous political system. So that ever and ever again there is a new attempt to harmonize the particular tendencies within the two-party system.

Liberalism, as the intellectual expression of competitive capitalism, is incapable of maintaining itself along any other path than the one by which it is doomed eventually to be destroyed. Tho finding itself economically in contradiction to the Roosevelt regime, Liberalism is politically condemned to support it. Conversely to the usual order of things, we here find the victim serving his hangman with the last meal before going to the gallows. By means of the liberalistic propaganda, the Roosevelt regime has succeeded in winning the great mass of the workers, so that in the coming elections also the gain of the parliamentary labor parties will be at most an insignificant one, if any. The outcome of the elections will show once more that the influence of the parliamentary labor movement upon American democracy is slighter than the jokes of Mae West. The trade-union leaders, who logically function within the framework of the capitalist parties, still find it very easy to mobilize the entire trade-union movement for Roosevelt. in spite of all the previous disappointments which his Administration has brought the workers. The last convention of the United Mine Workers of America went down deep in its pockets for the Roosevelt campaign fund and decided unanimously to vote for this best representative of industrial unionism. The secretary of the U.M. of A. proudly announced: "Let our vote for Roosevelt be our answer to the money bags of Wall Street." But they had decided only against the small and for the bigger money bags.

The demagogy put to use in present-day American politics is, as a matter of fact, distracting and hard to fathom.

When big capitalists like Mellon, Raskob, Morgan, Du Pont are dragged before investigating committees in order to disclose the secrets of economics and politics; when at all conferences of the manufacturers and bankers protests are made against measures of the Roosevelt regime,--can the layman come to any other conclusion than that Roosevelt is actually carrying on in opposition to Capital? What the administration, in the interest of its reelection, has to exert pressure upon individual capitalist groups, and is compelled to favor others, that it has to draft tax programs that bring results, and that the menacing war makes it necessary to clean up the armament industry and to bring about a national coordination of the international credit policy,--such obvious things vanish behind the sensational interpretations put upon them by the press. People fail to see that it is precisely the strengthening of the capitalist and military positions, not the longing for peace and a sound national economy, that lies at the basis of the activity of these investigating committees.

However, it is not the propaganda for or against Roosevelt that will decide in the last instance the victory of the one or the other party. The fact that success was attained under the Roosevelt Administration in holding up temporarily the economic decline, and in stabilizing the system for a time at a certain crisis level, assures the administration sufficient sympathy so that its reelection is highly probable. The time before the election is too brief to preclude, even in view of the new worsening of the economic situation which is now under way, an artificial prolongation of the present stagnation. The economic breathing spell attained by way of credit inflation and intensified technical rationalization can still be prolonged somewhat and enable Roosevelt to win the race again. But behind the credit inflation looms the unconcealed inflation of the currency, the complete expropriation of the middle class and intensified pauperization of the workers. The open inflation is less seductive in the United States than in most countries, owing to the high degree of amalgamation between debtors and creditors, it is nevertheless within the realm of the probabilities in view of the impossibility of sharp and sudden turns in the field of economy and politics. The danger of inflation is being played up stronger than ever by the opposition to Roosevelt. With or without inflation, however, the present economic policy is speculating on better times; even today it is living on the hoped-for profits of the future. If these fail to appear, the present program is bound to capsize and will be abandoned even as a phrase. Politics will then become as brutal as economics ever is, and the "Savior of the people" must then become an "Enemy of the people".

But all the election shouting can be of interest only to those whose thoughts are turned in the capitalist direc-

tion. As regards the parliamentary labor movement, this is bound up with recognizing in principle the capitalist system and its State, and also with the hope of deriving from the parliamentary table a few paltry crumbs. "Leaders must eat"; that is the final ground for the parliamentarism of the present-day labor movement. Even tho there are only a few parliamentary positions, still one can bring in more membership contributions with a parliamentary than with an anti-parliamentary program. Whichever way they may vote, the workers will always find in the last instance that they have only made their choice between parasites and exploiters. As for us, we attach no special importance to the question of who exploits us; the thing that we are concerned with is the doing away with all exploitation. And so we can only advise our class comrades not to vote. Or if they reject this proposal as too negative, and wish to conduct a more positive and more realistic policy,--well, of course, there is no one to prevent them from spitting in the face of the parliamentarians.

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R E A D :

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THE MINERS' STRIKE IN BELGIUM

The strike of the Belgium miners in May 1935 must be rated as one of the most significant struggles of the past ten years. These strikers employed tactics which had not been heard of before in the history of Belgian labor. For the first time large masses of workers refused to accept the leadership of trade unions as well as the advice of party politicians; instead, they insisted on conducting the strike themselves and allowed only members from their own ranks to represent them at the arbitration boards. For the first time, thus, the workers acted unitedly as a class in contradistinction to party and trade union policies which sought to separate them into trades, crafts, etc., a policy as we have repeatedly pointed out--that is utterly wrong in face of the objective conditions. The birth of the self-initiative of these workers is all the more astounding because there existed no group which propagated these principles.

What factors were instrumental in turning the workers against their unions and towards new methods?

The Situation Before the Strike.

The "black country"--as the mining district in South Belgium is called--is poverty stricken. Unemployment is rampant. Since 1925 many mines have been closed and of the 38,000 miners formerly employed, only 20,000 worked at the time of the strike, and many of these were employed but part of the time. In other districts farther North, conditions are somewhat better; nowhere, however, does a miner work five days per week, and the wages are very low. These wages are not stationary; they fall or rise in accordance with the change of market prices for consumers' goods. This "genuine" method is called the "flexible wage scale", and as wages are usually behind prices, it is estimated that the loss on the workers' side amounts to approximately 30%. The standard of living is so low that in most cases miners are compelled to live on a piece of bread during their eight hours of hard and dangerous labor. The mines are in horrible condition; many have faulty or no safety devices at all, and the number of casualties is extremely high.

The trade unions and the Socialist Party found in the miners their strongest supporters. The Stalinites had and still have little influence. As the economic crisis deepened, the workers called for action and demanded the general strike, but the leadership declared that strikes at that time would mean suicide to the organization. Sporadic

strikes, however, broke out in many districts and in 1932 they gained such momentum that the union leaders were compelled to support the movement.

During and after these strikes, the Trotzkyites gained great influence because of their persistent fight against the union bureaucracy, and although the miners remained members of the unions, the ideological influence of the Trotzkyites was widely felt. Dissatisfaction with the trade union leadership grew and found expression in many demonstrations and demands for action. The leaders balked and, during the cabinet-crisis, went to the king, told him of the plight of the masses and persuaded him to form a catholic-socialist cabinet. Five former socialists entered the government as secretaries of state among whom were Delattre president of the miners' union, and Spaak, a former arch-enemy of the reformists. The masses who had great confidence in the latter soon realized his treacherous role and "relieved" him of his job as editor of "Socialist Action". With ever increasing force, it dawned upon the miners that they could hope for nothing from their leaders and that they would have to rely upon their own power to circumvent further pauperization.

The Strike.

On May 1, 1935 thousands of workers followed the call of the socialist parties and the trade unions to celebrate May-Day. The huge street demonstrations were peaceful and no sign of unrest was noticeable. But trouble began the following morning at the mine "Pont de Loup". Angered by the discovery that several hundred miners had not observed May-Day, the May-Day celebrators demanded the dismissal of the strike breakers. The mining company refused to comply with the demand. Thereupon 600 miners went out on strike, issuing a strike call which included the following points:

1. Occupation of the pit-heads
2. Spreading of the strike to other mines
3. The strike to be led by the strikers themselves, interference by trade unions and political parties not to be tolerated
4. Dismissal of the strike breakers
5. 10% wage increase
6. The trade unions to be informed of these demands

Twenty-four hours later the company yielded; the strike was over.

The news of this speedy success spread rapidly from mine to mine. Everywhere it was talked about; everywhere the miners felt that they too could do what the boys from the "Pont de Loup" had done. About a week later the great strike broke out. Food prices had been increased by 10% while the wages

remained constant. The bitterness of the workers reached its height when it became known that the socialist Minister Dellattre, had cancelled the additional pay for the care of children which previously had been granted by the conservative government of Theunis. The day after the publication of this new decree, 500 workers of the St. Barbara mine struck. Following the "Pont de Loup" example, they remained on the property of the company. The company refused to negotiate and advised the strikers to leave the property before midnight or they would call in the militia. The majority of the strikers disregarded the warning. At 12 o'clock lights were suddenly turned off and the militia attacked the unarmed workers. The battle raged until dawn before the miners yielded to the superior military force. Wholesale arrests followed. The strike seemed to be crushed, but on the following day 10,000 miners at Hennegau and Charleroi walked out in protest against the butchery at St. Barbara-- a small number, however, if one remembers that there are approximately 30,000 miners in these districts. Yet the significance lies in the fact that the strike broke out spontaneously and that the strikers refused to be led by the official trade union leaders. The ruling class and its lackeys were very much disturbed by the development of the strike. There were at first not more than 15 to 20% of the total workers on strike, and the government organs in collaboration with the trade unions labored feverishly to discredit it and bring it under control. They knew that a leaderless mass movement might attempt to crush the 'sacred institutions of the capitalist state. A former member of the German Reichstag, Delbrueck, once said of the great election victory of the Social Democrats: "Such a victory could become dangerous if there were no leaders, but with leaders one can negotiate; they are humans like we are and they too cook their soup with water".

However, these masses had no leaders. The workers had consummated a real united front in their own ranks. They refused to be misled by parties and trade unions, and they ignored the usual procedure of trade unionism with each of the craft unions determining independently its own attitude. In the past, the unorganized mass had not been called upon at all, and yet very often this same mass represents the factor that may determine success or failure of a strike.

In this strike, the workers succeeded in overcoming their organizational disunity. They composed their resolutions jointly, ignoring the specific organizational attachment of the various individuals. Class unity superseded organizational discipline.

For the strikers this movement was essentially a wage struggle. They were searching for new forms in their struggle only because the old way of the unions had failed. And these new forms were found in two measures: organizationally

in the self-acting fighting-committees (workers' councils) whose actions were independent of all parties and unions, and, in action, thru the occupation of various mines. Of the 15 mines that were on strike on Thursday, May 16, six were occupied by the workers. Their unity was expressed in the common direction. Together they fought and together they were determined to conclude the issue. The mines were occupied in order to prevent the continuation of work by strike breakers, and also because it was essential to preserve a united front which would disappear if individual strikers would go home and lose close touch with the mass. The feeling of solidarity is much greater when all are continuously together. The occupation would also serve as a weapon against the mine owners as it was expected that troops would be called in. It was planned to damage the equipment if the workers would be attacked by the militia. This was carried out later but only to a small extent. Although the workers had a picket at the dynamite magazine-- whose contents might be used for damaging certain shafts-- nothing was done in this respect.

When a mine was occupied, the gates were closed and a workers' defense committee was formed. Pickets were placed at the gates day and night permitting no one to enter. The emergency work was carried out by the strikers themselves. The horses were regularly fed and the pumps continued to work to remove the water. The movement thus assumed a character entirely devoid of force. It was decided to take forcible action only when the troops applied force.

The Trade Unions Choke the Strike.

The administrative authorities as well as the trade unions tried in every possible way to crush the strike movement. The Miners' Federation demanded that its members resume work, thus becoming a strike breaking organization.

The main council of the miners' union issued a proclamation to the miners in which it warned of communist agitators who put difficulties in the way of the five socialist secretaries of state that were making an effort to ameliorate the conditions of the working class. The proclamation declared that strikes at that time were justified only in exceptional cases, and then only if arbitration failed to resolve the difficulties. From the beginning, the miners' union opposed the sporadic strikes and pointed out in a manifesto that these strikes were "a breach of promise" and in opposition to the tactics pursued by the modern labor movement.

These tactics, to settle the conflict, met with no success. The only result (which was important to the ruling class and its servants, the trade unions) was that the great mass of miners did not yet participate in the strike. The

bureaucracy of the trade unions now tried to employ different methods to break the strike, which, evidently, proved more successful. As was known, the demands of the miners were not identical in all cases. In one place minimum wages were the only demand, in another an increase in wages, and still in others the maintenance of the additional pay for children. The last mentioned demand and that for a minimum wage of 30 fr. a day was almost general, while in addition in some mines an increase in wages of 5%, in others of 10% was demanded.

These varying demands were used very cleverly by the trade unions to settle the conflicts in various individual mines. In the Marchienne au Pont Mine the miners' leaders obtained the promise of the Mine Administration that the lowest wages would be improved. The strikers were satisfied with this settlement and decided to resume work on Friday. In the Dampreny Mine the conflicts were settled in the same way. In the industrial center of Charleroi another way was tried, in addition to the above mentioned methods, to break the strike. The miners' union called for a congress on the 19th of May of the coal center of Charleroi only. It was ascertained that around Charleroi eight local strikes with 3,000 men involved were effective. The delegates defended the occupation of the mines and declared that this had not been influenced by communistic activities, but that "the miners were forced by misery to do so". Finally a resolution was passed which:

1. disapproved of the occupation of the mines by the miners
2. urged the miners to accept the old existing wage agreements
3. and stated that the national, mixed mine commission would be requested to arrange a meeting to discuss improving wages which are below 30 fr. a day

This resolution was accepted with a small majority; 17 locals were for it, 14 against it, and 5 abstained from voting. Various locals were not represented. It is important to note that the union employed here the "democracy" of a board of arbitration as a weapon against the strikers.

The State Participates.

The unions were not the only participants in stifling the strike movement. They had strong allies in the state authorities. What better purpose could the five socialist Ministers perform who had the armed force at their disposal? Monday, May 19th, it became known that 500 soldiers were on their way to the industrial center of Charleroi,

and this naturally aroused the deep anger of the miners. The strikers went to the mines and occupied a few more shafts. On Tuesday, May 20th, the news spread that the troops had actually arrived. When this became known, many hurried to the mines, and especially the women encouraged the men to hold out. The strikers allowed no one to enter the mines, not even the socialist and communist leaders.

The militia settled the struggle in their well-known way. Without losing time, they marched to the mines, encircled them and attacked the workers with tear gas, driving them out of the shafts. Fifteen men at Pont de Loup were unwilling to surrender. They climbed 200 meters down thru an air shaft to start a hunger strike. After being threatened that they would be gassed also, they were forced to give up. Within a short time the shafts were cleared and all mines were occupied by soldiers. However, this interference by the police did not end the conflict. The miners answered with an extension of the strike. The following day, Wednesday, work was laid down in 28 mines involving 13,000 workers. On Thursday, May 23, the strike movement spread further into the center of Charleroi and vicinity. Thirty-two of 59 mines were now on strike, affecting 18,000 men.

The interference of the armed force had obviously caused quite the opposite result to that planned by the socialist Ministers. Instead of suppressing the movement, it had spread to 18,000 workers and the strike was growing stronger every day. Therefore, another attempt by the socialist government was made to reach the goal by means of "democracy". "Reasons have apparently no influence on the miners", said the central organ of the Dutch Social Democracy, on May 23. "The advices of the union leaders are disregarded. The latter hope to reach an agreement at the meeting of the national mine commission". Since the five socialist Ministers, the union leaders and the armed forces were unable to choke the strike and thus submit the workers anew to the exploitation of capitalism, they resorted, as a last measure, to "democracy". The speculation on the influence which the workers supposedly have on the mine commission had the desired effect!

In the Mine Commission a compromise was reached with the promise that the lowest wages were to be improved. Furthermore, there should be a general increase in wages of 5% because the index of the food prices had been raised that much. As a "concession" of the coal barons, an immediate payment of 2-1/2% wage increase was obtained which, however, was to be deducted later from the 5% wage increase taking place on June 1. Finally, the socialist government announced thru Delattre that the decree about the deduction of the additional pay for children would be subject to a later revision.

The miners subsequently returned to their pits. "The strikers appear to have regained their senses", wrote the Social Democratic Press. "They listen again to the union leaders who appear in their meetings".

Local Charleroi of the miners' union resolved by 57% to accept the agreement, and the centrum was also satisfied. The five socialist Ministers and the trade unions had attained their aim - the stifling of the strike.

Conclusion.

This struggle disclosed to the Belgian miners the role that trade unions and social democracy play in the present period. It becomes more and more evident to the workers that social democracy and trade unions in case of a conflict between workers and the owning class take the side of capitalism, and that they will employ all methods in order to suppress a strike. At the same time this strike revealed the pronounced class antagonism. In order to avoid only a deduction in the additional pay for children and to assure themselves of as low a wage as 30 francs a day - meaning 120-150 fr. in a general working week of 4-5 days - in other words, just for the bare existence, the workers were forced to wage a fight against the State and five socialist Ministers with their armed forces and, in addition, even against their own trade unions.

The miners' strike of May 1935 is over, but the movement has not yet reached its end. 1935 was only the continuation of the strike movement in 1932 with subsequent smaller strikes. The reasons for the continued difficulties are still in existence and the situation is thus ripe for revolutionary propaganda. These workers who found thru class instinct the right way to united action will now understand that the new forms of struggle are not "accidental" but will be at the center of the coming class movements. The propaganda that is now required must emphasize the necessity for industrial unity and the importance of self-leadership on the part of the workers. Methods to be used in the struggle must be decided by the workers themselves and not be outside agencies which only lead labor in the interest of capitalism.

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