

In New Zealand

I have just read J. A. McDonald's article in the Clarion, dated June 16th, 1922, and I am surprised at his conclusions regarding the officials of the Communist Party here.

While I believe that Com. McDonald did some very useful work in endeavouring to promote revolutionary ideas in this country, his comments concerning the above are not strictly correct and consequently are open to criticism.

"The Communist Party," he says, "is very small both numerically and intellectually. As is usual with hero-worshipping aggregations, the intellectual stock-in-trade is confined to a wearisome repetition of 'Lenin says,' etc."

Then he compares the coal miners of the North and South Islands, so it would appear, with the intellectual failings of the C. P. He tells us that the coal miners "are receptive of Socialist propaganda, and show a genuine desire to study the philosophy and assist in its dissemination." As if to say that the Communist Party and its officials were not.

The fact of the matter is that the officials are as intellectual as any group that can be found in N. Z., not even omitting the coal miners. Besides, coal miners have been officials in both the C. P. and the Marxian Association, the former of which superseded the M. A. that was.

The coal miners, in spite of their supposed revolutionary-intellectual propensities are at the present time one of the most reactionary organisations in the country and certainly more reactionary than they were some few years ago. One has only to cite the instance of the surrender of all principles to the dictum of the Arbitration Court, when only a few days before they were going to raise Cain. I am a coal miner myself and know something about revolutionary activities—thanks to a large extent to my past membership of the S. P. of C.

I have been in N. Z. seven years or more, and in that time have been among the miners in both islands and also among the officials of the Government Party, so I am in a position to talk. I assisted in the formation of the Marxian Association as well as acting as instructor to classes—perhaps for want of a better one—and I can safely say that while the officials were not all that could be desired at times, there was a steady improvement, intellectually, going on.

There are good individual students among the miners, but there are also some very poorly informed ones, and which are none the less bombastic and egotistical on that account. As is usual, those latter catch the eye and help to confound new students by the constant application of sophisticated arguments.

Everywhere I have been in N. Z. the same individualistic tactics are pursued, along with that dog-in-the-manger explanation of the materialistic conception of history which in their opinions, allows individuals to commit certain breaches on the job, which they calmly smooth over by telling people that when conditions get worse it will make the people think. This explanation is not only fatalistic but contrary to the Marxian explanation. "Marx says so" in "Value, Price and Profit." If Marx advocates the struggle, on the T. U. field, for shorter hours, higher wages, better conditions, etc., where are we getting off at if we, as Marxians, advocate non-acceptance of progressive union rules? Anyhow I would like a Party explanation of the Materialistic conception of history in its relationship to individuals, especially "class conscious" ones. It might not only interest me, but others as well.

Com. McDonald, referring to the visit of Moses Baritz to N. Z. said that the party officials (of the then Marxian Association) who also to some extent became officials of the C. P.) did not appreciate the lectures given by that comrade, "a fact that leads me to the conclusion that the lectures must have been alright." I want to say that the lectures were appreciated, indeed it was the executive of the M. A. that arranged for Baritz to come to N. Z. from Australia. I think another comrade was waiting for

him on the wharf at Wellington, and apart from the trouble with the police, he had a fairly good time while it lasted. As far as Bartiz was concerned, and even McDonald, they were intellectually far above us. But that is no reason why a wrong conception should be placed upon the ideas of the officials and individuals. Off the "stage" Moses Baritz spoke to the members as a student to students; that is more than the officials claim for McDonald. For McDonald to reason that Bartiz's lectures were alright on the basis he did, throws him open to the suspicion of prejudice, does it not?

The officials are no hero-worshippers and it must be remembered that these same officials were studying the Marxian Philosophy, as best they knew how, long before they heard the name of Lenin mentioned.

One thing that troubles me at the present time is why McDonald, while on the West Coast, did his best to prevent those comrades from joining up with the Communist Party. At the present time I understand that this small-mushroom growth is on the wane and the possibilities are that it will go the way of the C. P. itself. One thing must be stressed in relation to revolutionary activities in N. Z., and that is the utter carelessness that obtains in organisation work.

With the officials, with the classes, and with individuals, there seems to be only a very rudimentary idea of a definite plan of organisation, which leaves everybody isolated, and as Com. McDonald infers, there is room for comrades who can speak. Unfortunately those who seem able to speak here, are those who are after meal tickets either in the Unions or in the so-called Labour Party, with perhaps one or two exceptions.

In regard to trusts and monopolies I would advise Com. McDonald to look for it in the shipping circles of this country and there he will find it with a vengeance. He will also find that there are several industries here that are larger than the mining industry, and are not nearly so crude in method as mining is.

Finally, I have to say that in recent times there has been a migration of Marxians from N. Z. to Australia; these latter were more connected with the official group, than any other in N. Z., and McDonald told me himself that they were about the most progressive in Australia.

Yours for Socialism,

ALBERT E. HART.

Huntly, N. Z., Nov. 7th, 1922.

M'DONALD'S REPLY.

MY article, "In New Zealand" has evoked a mild storm of protest. The article was republished in the "Grey River Argus," and labor leaders in the columns of the "Argus" and the "Maoriland Worker" bitterly resented my references to the Labor Party.

While in N. Z. I continually attempted to engage the representatives of that Party in debate, but not one of them had the temerity to accept the challenge. After my departure they became very brave indeed.

The Workers' Educational Assn., is a dangerous offshoot of the universities, disseminating their pernicious doctrines in mining camps and other industrial centres. I exhausted every effort consistent with good sportsmanship to get the teachers of the W. E. A. to meet me on a platform, or in a Class room, but all to no avail. Now they squawk.

Now it is the C. P. In a recent issue of the Clarion a correspondent from Auckland, N. Z., deplores the fact that I did not lecture in that vicinity. So do I. Financial desecritude, that never failing proletarian disorder, made it imperative to hasten my departure. Climate and scenery, though excellent factors themselves, are totally inadequate to supply vitality to even a Socialist propagandist.

The present letter of Albert E. Hart contains little of any importance. Two points necessitate a

brief reply. I am censured for saying that the miners' organization was revolutionary. Such a statement was not made. The article contains the information that the revolutionary movement in N. Z. is to be found among the miners. That anything more than a small minority of these are Marxists I have not inferred.

As to why I did my best to prevent the miners on the West Coast from linking up with the C. P., to put it briefly, that was the only attitude a Marxist could take. Nor was I alone on this position. Com. David Anderson and Eli Hunt, two ex-members of the S. P. of C., who have spent the past ten years in educational work in the mining sections of N. Z., very materially assisted me in this action. Comrade J. Sullivan of Petone, who, although never a member of the S. P. of C., is one of the most capable Marxian students in N. Z. also strongly advised against joining an aggregation of social and economic freaks like the C. P.

The opinions of these and other comrades, who were in a position to pass judgment on the matter, assisted me in coming to a conclusion that I would have arrived at anyway. Com. Balderstone, who had charge of activities during my stay on the "Coast," will gladly furnish information in regard to the stand taken to all parties while there.

Hart conveniently reads into my article what he thinks necessary to start an argument. I am too busily engaged in propaganda work to fall for such nonsense. My article, "In New Zealand," speaks for itself. It is my impression of the situation in that country as I saw it.

WINNIPEG, MAN.

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