

What Is a Strike?

By MARGARET P. WATT

Many people, especially newspaper editors, do not seem to know what a strike is. A strike simply means that the workers have withdrawn their commodity, labor-power, from the market.

A market is a place where things are bought and sold for a price. When goods are scarce and the demand is heavy, prices rise; when commodities are plentiful and there is no demand, prices fall. But it sometimes happens that the sellers of commodities have to "test" the market in order to see whether they can raise the price of whatever they are offering for sale. To test the market means to "withdraw" commodities from it in order to see whether the purchasers will offer a higher price for the goods which they wish to buy. To test the market is the indispensable right of all commodity sellers. It is a necessary condition of capitalist society, which is based upon the production and "exchange" of commodities. As "exchange" is inseparable from "production" under capitalism it follows that in exchanging goods upon the market the owners of commodities demand the right, and it has never been denied them, to test the market by withholding goods from it in order to see if prices will rise.

Among the many commodities offered for sale is labor-power. This commodity is sold in what is termed the labor market. The workers are compelled to sell their labor power to the capitalist class upon the labor market, because that class owns and controls all the means of existence. In return for selling their commodity, labor power, the workers receive wages, the "price" of labor power. Like all other commodity sellers the wage earners must "test" the market, in order to know if they can force a higher price, by withdrawing their commodity from the market. Therefore, when any group of artisans attempt to raise their wages, or shorten their working week, they can only "test" the

labor market by withholding their labor power. The workers in doing this only adopt what is considered the legitimate right of every commodity seller. But when the workers withdraw their commodity, labor power, from the market that is a strike. And then the press, politicians, and pulpiteers go stark, raving mad and scream about the rights of the community, of the state and of the public. Nay, further, the government sends policemen to bludgeon the strikers armed troops are drafted into the area, and tanks appear on the scene. And all for what? Because the workers do what every commodity seller does, what every merchant does—withdraw their commodity from the market in order to test it.

Last Sunday's National News (16/2/19) contains a series of bold, front-page headings which show that food merchants, meat contractors, fish dealers, and landlords are holding their commodities off the market in order to get higher prices. We have read this paper carefully and we have scrutinized the small paragraphs with a microscope, but we have not seen any references to indicate that the government had sent policemen, soldiers, or tanks against those merchants. The National News calls the rent raisers "modern-highwaymen." But there have been no landlords sent to prison. These gentlemen are sent by the government to the House of Lords!

Wherein, then, differs the action of the merchants who withhold their commodities from the market and the strikers? Why are the former made O.B.E.'s and the workers branded as criminals? The difference is that when capitalists increase the prices of their commodities profits rise. When the workers increase the price of their commodity, labor power, i.e., wages, profits fall!

And, Mr. Worker, because you attack profits the army, police, tanks, and the labor party is set upon you. Glasgow Socialist, Feb. 20, 1919.

THE POLICY FOR PEACE

[From "The Labor Leader," February 13]

The time is critical. The workers have felt that and have put in their claims early. Reconstruction is going on. Big business has been busy throughout the war. New machines for coal-getting, for example, already are at work to dispense with labor. The workers were right in not waiting for that leisurely peace. They have put in for the reconstructors to take account of them first instead of last. The Premier has had to come home and get a new Labor Minister. But, in this supreme concern of better conditions for the people, Labor must still remember that we cannot go two ways at once. We cannot win through with a peaceful, fruitful revolution at home while helping to create starvation, unemployment and civil war abroad.

There must be one policy for home and foreign affairs. Unity of policy is a first necessity. The day has gone past for paradox, like that hideous futility of ensuring peace by preparing for war. Time has revenged itself on all such contradictions. The French peasants wanted the Republic to be peaceful and secure—and they lent money to Tsarism. The German workers wanted a better standard of life—and they tolerated militarism! The English people saw Chamberlain the Radical—and yet suffered Liberal Imperialism to join its talons with Russia in Persia! Kerensky, child of a revolution against Imperialism and war, nevertheless arranged for a great offensive. So one could continue.

But there must be an end to such follies. American capitalists at any rate have some wit for this situation. American papers are explaining why, on purely business grounds, Central Europe must be fed. We have a greater principle. An injury to one is an injury to all. The

blockade—that strangle-hold on half Europe—has become the meanest, most despicable extension of warfare, and the most dire threat to peace. Yet while peace is planned—or plotted—at Paris this act of war goes on. Instead of a renewed half-war a preliminary peace with Germany should by now have put an end to belligerency. The principles were settled last October. The peace itself should have followed before Christmas. Had it been taken in hand Europe would now know its position. There would have been a real peace upon which the international Labor movement could organize for the betterment of the workers of the world. Instead of that it is still possible to threaten the Labor movement at home by checking demobilization and renewing the talk of war.

The Liberals behind President Wilson have some glimpses of the need of a consistent policy for peace. They see the alternative between an ultimate destruction of civilization and a League of Nations. They begin to realize that no league can last which does not guarantee international co-operation in regard to raw materials. But Wilson, like John Bright and his school of old, does not follow out this reasoning. He does not perceive that co-operation between nations is helpless unless Socialist states swallow up capitalism within the nations. On the other side are the Jingo Labor men and social reformers, who are all for a British co-operative commonwealth and Rule Britannia. Either road is impossible. The resources of the nation for the free and equal people of the nation; the resources of the world for the free and equal nations of the world—that is the sound way. There can be no Merrie England without the subversion of Imperialism by International, and no international order without democratic social order at home. Faithful to one policy at home and abroad we may conquer the whole evil of the world. Faithless in either sphere we are doomed.

MOSCOW AND THE UKRAINE

[From the Manchester Guardian of March 6]

The Bolsheviks announce that the first supplies have reached Moscow from the Ukraine as a result of the Ukraine going Bolshevik. The amounts mentioned are modest enough, and we have not forgotten that the Central Powers, despite great trumpeting, did not get much out of the Ukraine. It is very possible, indeed, that the Ukraine, which has known so much disorder, has little if any surplus for export. Still, for what it is worth, this is the beginning of the breaking of the iron ring of the blockade with which the Russian dissidence and Allied policy have surrounded Great Russia since the Bolsheviks came to power. It offers a good opportunity to the Allies to reconsider their blockade policy. We shall not argue that the suspension of the blockade will automatically bring about the downfall of the Bolsheviks; no man knows whether it will or it will not. But if the blockade is likely to be pierced by the expansion of Bolshevik authority, then it is unlikely to have much political authority. It becomes merely the bootless infliction of so much hunger and misery upon so many millions of hapless persons. We could wish our rulers could acquire the habit of thinking about the blockade in concrete terms—as the torture, for instance, of babies, as the misery of mothers, as miscarriages, as infant mortality, as disease, as incurable sickness. None of us want to inflict these things, but we are inflicting them on most of Europe and a goodly stretch of Asia. And we are doing it because there is so fine-sounding a name for it as—the blockade.

THE BLOCKADE OF RUSSIA

"At this moment, three powerful Allied fleets are blockading Revolutionary Russia. One is guarding the landing of 20,000 soldiers sent by the Entente to the northern region. A second is operating in the Black Sea. A third is occupying the Baltic and the Gulf of Finland. The English admiral who commands it has ordered the sinking, no more nor less, of Russian craft commanded by sailors and Bolsheviks. It is bombarding the Baltic coast. So much for doings by sea. On land the Entente has laid hands on the wheat grainaries of Siberia, thus preventing Russia from getting food; it coolly condemns her to famine and death; it then spreads, by means of its press, rumors of ghastly distress which, as a fact, is desolating Moscow and Petrograd. The Entente has hypocritically allowed it to be believed that it has renounced a military expedition: a lie. It has not withdrawn a single man, either from the Murman coast or from Odessa, or from Siberia. On the contrary, it is sending relief forces daily. In the bargain, the Poles, Lithuanians, Finns, Ukrainians are to be excited against the Russian Republic, a Polish expedition is being prepared—we are maintaining, with the money of the French people, reactionary troops, commanded by felons outright like Denikin, Koleshak, Krasnov: more, we are maintaining German troops in the Ukraine."—M. Cachin, in L'Humanite, Paris, Feb. 27.

BESSARABIA IS IN REVOLT

WARSAW, March 27.—Bessarabia has proclaimed its independence, established a Soviet republic and begun an offensive against the Roumanian army of occupation, a despatch from Chotin announced today.

Bessarabia is a former province of Russia, bordering Roumania on the northeast. It has been claimed and occupied by Roumania.

The Bessarabian army has captured the important town of Sadagora and is pushing the Roumanians across the Pruth River toward Largu.

The belief was expressed here that the Russian Bolsheviks are engineering the Bessarabian campaign for the purpose of establishing direct communication between Moscow and Budapest.