

Labor News From Coast to Coast

"OUR OVERSEAS COLUMN"

The Duty of Labor

By Leon Joubaux
(General Secretary of the French Confederation of Labor)

The international working class movement must put the fight against war in the very forefront of its activities.

It was Jaures who declared that the primary duty of Labor was to work for the disarmament of the nations. What greater duty can it have?

Although Labor has always stood for peace, no preceding generation has ever had such bitter proof of the fact that nationalism, militarism and war are absolutely incompatible with the ideals of Labor. The terrible experience of 1914-1918 has at last taught the workers that in international conflicts they are cold-bloodedly sacrificed, being deliberately exposed to the sufferings which cannot fall to accompany such conflicts.

Not only have they seen battlefields soaked with the blood of millions of their brothers—they have also known, and they are still experiencing all the sufferings which are the inevitable aftermath of war. They it is who have to bear the inevitable aftermath of war. They it is who have to bear the burden of the upheaval and ruin of the world. Millions of workers are forced to endure unemployment and to watch their children growing up stunted by its physical and moral evils; others are compelled to work for lamenable low wages, which mean neither more nor less than semi-starvation. There is not one that does not realize how terrible a menace is war to the conditions under which he lives and works, and to the hard-won gains of former days.

Thus, the same war that enriches the capitalist drags down the worker by reducing his wages, and exhausting his poor savings.

We must all admit that time has shown the utter falsity of the prophecies of the complete collapse and inevitable bankruptcy of the old order. A wave of reaction which is almost universal has forced the workers' organizations to stand on the defensive and even then their position is by no means a easy one. It is futile to hide the facts, and to ignore the difficulties which beset our path. It is much more honest and courageous to look them in the face and to learn the lessons which they teach us, adding as they do yet another reason to the many which already exist for detesting war.

"In war it is not the country which is exposed to the worst dangers," said Lamartine, the well known French poet. "It is liberty." War is almost always a dictatorship.

But the evil deeds of war do not stop with the war itself. They leave behind them a trail of reaction, and only too often of dictatorship. Terrible have been the experiences of the world during the past five years. The various cults of nationalism feed each other, they wax fat on the hate and suspicion which each provokes; they claim that they are fighting one against the other, but in reality they depend on each other's support; and what they actually do effect is the strangling of all liberty.

We know only too many examples of this: We know only too well how, either as openly recognized dictatorships, or else under the guise of commercial exploitation or of patriotic emotion these nationalist cults are associated with the capitalist powers which they serve, and are turned against Labor, which they fear.

It may often happen that it was let loose on purpose to create a diversion against the efforts of enslaved classes to free themselves; but whatever its cause, its invariable effect is to hamper the acquisition of liberty and the establishment of justice. The duty of the working classes as such, is therefore to resist all war and all causes of war. And this duty is inseparable from the aspirations of all those who seek to promote the progress of humanity and to defend humanity against those evil forces which would plunge it into bloodshed and drag it down to shame and dishonor.

HUNGARY

Adjustment of Wage Disputes—According to a recently published decree of the Royal Hungarian Ministry serious disputes concerning wages between employers and employees, which the parties are unable to settle among themselves, must, upon application of one of the parties to an industrial inspector, be referred to an official adjustment committee, which is thereafter attended by the employers and the workers, or their delegates.

The Stupefying Effect of Tradition

(From "The Daily Herald")

One hundred and fifty years ago a British Admiral was granted a state pension of £2,000. Ten years later it was arranged that this pension should continue so long as there were any heirs of the Admiral bearing his name and title. So for 150 years the nation has gone on paying Lord Rodney's descendants their dole.

Lately, attention has been called to this by Labor M.P.s, and recently the Treasury published a proposal to end the drain on our resources by paying the present Lord Rodney £42,000 and extinguishing the pension.

What a comment on our civilization! Famous authors, if they fall on poverty, are granted £50 to £100 a year; at their death this ceases; their descendants get nothing. No famous artist, man of science, inventor, or administrator has ever had his services rewarded at anything like this rate. As a rule the State pays no heed to them at all. But because Kings delighted to honor the men who fought their battles and gained them increase of territory and beat off the predatory attacks of other Kings, we went on making grants to admirals and generals long after Kings had ceased to be important, and we go on still.

To Lord Haig and Lord Beatty, both rich men, and to others very, very large sums of money were granted after our most recent war. Why? Because we followed tradition. They had done nothing to merit gratitude more than had been done by every private soldier and every able seaman; indeed, they had done less, for they were not called upon to bear discomfort and hardship. Yet we filled their pockets fuller just because this had been the practice of kings.

So powerful is the influence of tradition, so ready are the minds of most people to be stupefied by what is customary, that very few saw anything to object to. Especially deadly is the effect of ancient practice when it concerns the fighting services. The great majority have been accustomed to let themselves be led by the nose in all matters affecting the Army and Navy. If they were told the Fleet must be increased they set up a cry for ships. If they were warned against reducing land forces, they declared it would be suicide to economize in that way.

As for strategy, which means the method of disposing our ships and men to best advantage, that is regarded as being beyond the cognizance of the ordinary mind. How many people, for example, have asked themselves what the transfer of our chief naval strength to the Mediterranean means? Having got rid of the German Fleet, we do not need it in the North Sea; so much is obvious. But why do we need it in the Mediterranean? Is there any Power there against whom we are to be egged on to fight, as we were against Germany for years before the war?

No question to-day more urgently than this demands honest, clear thinking. It will not do to say: "Of course we must have a Navy and of course it must go somewhere." That will merely expose us to be fooled and victimized again. We must get rid of the incubus of tradition. We must think out our problems for ourselves.

Bulky Pay Envelope Offered Plasterers

Thirteen Dollars for Eight-Hour Day Inducement in States

A rate of wages approximating \$4,000 per annum is offered to plasterers of Toronto who wish to work in the United States, according to an advertisement posted up on the bulletin board of the Labor Temple recently.

A number of plasterers are needed for work in the United States, and are offered \$13 a day of 8 hours, and promised 60 days' work. To secure them a firm in Chicago guarantees transportation to and from Toronto if any of those who accept the jobs are not anxious to remain in Chicago. The jobs are to be filled at once.

Building trades mechanics who are in the United States state that skilled workmen can find plenty of work, and that building will offer much employment there again this year. While the jobs are advertised for a period of 60 days, judging from letters received from the United States, there will be plenty of work for plasterers during the season. There will be opportunities for overtime pay.

News From the Various Countries

BRAZIL

Concession for Workmen's Dwellings—On Jan. 2nd, 1924, the Governor of Pernambuco, under a resolution known as Law No. 1, 1924, made a concession of sixteen years' exemption from the payment of taxes as a means of encouraging the construction of houses for workmen, government employees and private individuals.

Stevedores Seek Other Pursuits—On account of the low scale of wages at the Santos docks, stevedores are said to be abandoning the docks for other employment, especially agricultural occupations, in which higher wages are being paid. This condition, it is said, has resulted in the very slow handling of cargoes and the detention of ships. The dock companies are seeking to meet the demands for higher wages by increasing their charges to shippers 100 per cent.

CHILE

Labor Shortage—The reopening during the past six months, of numerous nitrate plants that had been idle since 1920, has caused an acute labor shortage in northern and central Chile.

DENMARK

Unemployment—Due to the shutting down of building operations throughout the country on account of the extremely severe winter weather, unemployment developed unfavorably during January, 1924, the total being 56,346 persons at the end of the month, as compared with 33,832 at the close of December, 1923.

Emigration—During the year 1923, Danish emigration to the United States was double that of the preceding year; while Canada received three times as many Danish immigrants as in 1922.

ENGLAND

Change in Wage Rate—Changes in rates of wages reported as having taken effect in January, 1924, resulted in an aggregate increase of £88,000 in the weekly full-time wages of nearly 1,900,000, and in an increase of £25,000 in the weekly wages of over 480,000 workers.

GERMANY

American Relief Committee Assists—Announcement in the Frankfurt papers that beginning last month one million children in Germany are to be provided with a daily meal by the American Relief Committee has been received with great satisfaction, particularly in municipal circles where the needs of the children are recognized as being urgent.

Placements—For every 100 positions open for men in December, 1923, there were 1,282 applications; for every 100 positions open for women there was 495 applications; and of every 100 applicants of both sexes approximately nine were placed in positions.

Civic Duty at Leipzig—All able-bodied unemployed persons in Leipzig, who are receiving municipal doles, are subject to call for civic duty, and any who refuse to work are cut off from their doles.

Emigration to Brazil—Large groups of emigrants are reported as having recently left the district of Hagen, Westphalia, for Brazil; and 700 additional families are said to be preparing to follow in the near future.

Longer Working Day—An arbitrator appointed by the Saxon State, after employers and workmen had

failed to agree upon the employers' proposal of an increase in working time, recommended an increase from 46 up to a maximum of 53 hours weekly, with extra pay for the overtime.

Unemployment—In the cities of Essen and Dueseldorf it is reported that sixty per cent. of the population is without employment; while 350,000 of the 700,000 inhabitants of Cologne are said to be getting assistance from public and private sources.

INDIA

Cotton Mill Industry—Latest available reports indicate difficulties in the cotton mill industry at Bombay. Recently, 160,000 operatives declared a strike on account of a dispute concerning the payment of a bonus, as to which they asked for arbitration. Mill-owners refused arbitration and an unfavorable situation has developed rapidly.

IRISH FREE STATE

Railway Wages Board—A "Railway Wages Board" has been formed, with jurisdiction over disputes between employers and employees, with regard to wages and working conditions, in both Northern and Southern Ireland. Seventeen members, representing the railways, the workers, and the public will comprise the Board.

ITALY

National Credit Institute—A decree dated December 15th, 1923, provides for the founding of a National Credit Institute, with a life of thirty years to assist Italian labor abroad.

Obligatory Insurance—The Gazzetta Ufficiale, of February 16th, has published a royal decree, dated December 30, 1923, providing for obligatory insurance against sickness and old age for persons of both sexes between the ages of 15 and 65, employed in any capacity in industry, commerce, agriculture, public service, liberal professions, and domestic or personal service. Premiums on such insurance are paid partly by the insured, partly by the employer and partly by the State.

JAPAN

Free Passage to South America—According to the Japan Times and Mail, any farm resident of the zone recently visited by earthquake, who wants to emigrate to San Paulo, Brazil, will be given ¥200 by the Kaigai Kogo Kaisha, an emigration company which is collecting Japanese settlers for the San Paulo tract, provided the prospective emigrant has ¥25 which he will apply to his passport charge, as an evidence of good faith.

SWEDEN

Unemployment—According to the Swedish Unemployment Commission, there were 16,100 laborers out of work on January 1st, 1924, as compared with 45,900 unemployed at the beginning of the year 1923. Of this total 10,700 were in the cities and 5,400 in the rural districts. On January 1st, 1924, only 1,566 of the unemployed were receiving State aid, as compared with 13,016 on January 1st, 1923.

TUNISIA

Aid for the Poor—To partially offset suffering among the poor, on account of increased living costs, the Tunisian Government has taken steps for the purchase of 50,000 kilos of olive oil (a staple article of food in Tunisia) for resale at the low price of five francs a liter to those of the poor who cannot afford to purchase oil at its present high price of seven francs a liter.

SWITZERLAND

Psychological Tests for Apprentices

An investigation among various industries at Geneva, made some time ago, disclosed that 28 per cent. of the persons taking up skilled work, either proved themselves incapable of carrying it on effectively, withdrew, or were dismissed. This disclosure has resulted in the application of psychological tests to apprentices, in order to find out what kind of work they may most profitably pursue, both as to their employers and themselves.

Factory Law Amendment Defeated

By a popular vote of 431,342 to 317,746, the amendment to the Factory Law, which proposed to establish a 54-hour week instead of the present 52-hour week, in times of national economic crises, was defeated.

NORWAY

Unemployment—Due, principally to strikes, unemployment in Norway is said to be on the increase.

B. C. Leads in Advanced Labor Laws

First Province to Give Legislative Effect to Eight-Hour Day

The British Columbia legislature is now leading Canada in the matter of legislation beneficial to the workers. It has the honor of being the first province to give legislative effect to the eight-hour day convention of the international labor organization, passed at the Washington conference in 1919. Although labor in British Columbia endeavored to have this act strengthened and brought into effect at an earlier date, we believe even in its present form, fairly administered, it sets a goal for labor in all the other provinces to reach.

Two other acts, namely, the tripartite system and the one day's rest in seven for fire-fighters, have also been enacted and bring British Columbia legislation in this respect into line with Ontario. That the fire fighters appreciate the efforts of the organized workers to secure these beneficial measures is evidenced by the fact that four new locals have been added to the International Association of Fire Fighters in cities of British Columbia during the past few months.

Factory legislation has also been strengthened by an amendment to the Factories Act, raising the age at which any child, male or female, may be employed in any factory in British Columbia, from fourteen to fifteen years.

The fifth measure is an act, known as the Women's and Girls' Protection act, which has the main purpose of this act are to prevent the employment of white girls in restaurants, laundries, etc., operated by Orientals, yet the act is drafted in such form as to include any employee where, in the opinion of the chief of municipal police or the inspector of provincial police, such employment would be against the interests of the morals of the women or girls so employed. This new act is similar to the one in existence in Saskatchewan and unlike the British Columbia act, which it repeals, and also the act of Ontario and Manitoba, does not specially allude to either Chinese or any other nationality, which provisions have evidently prevented the acts of these provinces from being a dead letter.

These acts cover matters that have been the subject of resolutions coming before the conventions of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada for a number of years, and sometimes sneeringly referred to by the revolutionary-inclined "reds" as "hardy annuals." We have no doubt, however, that the publicity given

these matters by the recent convention of the congress at Vancouver had a material effect in securing this legislation. The workers who directly benefit by these measures will not care whether they were "hardy annuals" or not, but will realize that it has been through the constant and persistent efforts of organized labor that so much progress has been made.

In congratulating the British Columbia legislature on having led the way for the general adoption of the eight-hour day and the passing of the other beneficial measures, enumerated above, we also extend our congratulations to the British Columbia provincial executive committee of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada for the good work performed on behalf of all the workers of that province, assisted as they have been, by the united voice of labor throughout the Dominion.



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