

THE RED FLAG

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WHAT MEANS THIS STRIKE?

An Open Letter to the Striking Workers of Vancouver

COMRADES:—You are striking in an endeavor to enforce recognition of the principle of collective bargaining. That is the immediate issue. But the struggle in which you are engaged, and of which your particular strike is but a part, is of far greater scope and far deeper significance than any mere matter of wages or conditions of labor, or the method by which such matters shall be adjusted.

This struggle, in which, by the very act of striking, you are now, consciously or unconsciously taking an active part, is one of the oldest in the history of society. It dates from that "dawn of civilization" about which some of our school histories speak so eloquently and, in fact, has its roots in that very thing which is the basis of all civilization, ancient and modern. That thing is human slavery.

To obtain a proper understanding of the nature and significance of this struggle it will be necessary to sketch briefly the conditions leading up to its inception. In the animal kingdom, to which we humans belong, there is continually being waged a struggle which scientists have named "The Struggle for Existence." In the final analysis, this may be said to appear as a struggle to obtain the means of subsistence, namely, food. Most forms of life are absolutely at the mercy of natural conditions in this connection. They depend entirely upon the kind and quantity of food which nature spontaneously furnishes them. No matter how prolifically they may propagate, their numbers can never exceed that limit which the available food supply imposes. Having no control over their food supply it follows that if for any reason, such as, for instance, adverse climatic conditions, their available supply of food is diminished great numbers of them must perish. Obviously under such conditions as these practically the whole available time and energy of the individual must be expended in the search and struggle for food.

Out of this struggle for existence man has emerged conspicuously ahead of all other animals. Some time, way back in the early history of the human race, he began to develop the ability to control to some degree his supply of food. He began to develop the art of producing and conserving food. In short, he began to discover how to harness the forces of nature and use them to supply his needs.

Once started along this line of development it was not very long, comparatively speaking, before man found that it was no longer necessary for him to spend all his waking hours in the search for food. It became possible for him to produce more than he could consume. As soon as this stage of development was reached, then began to arise that institution of slavery upon which our glorious civilization is built.

It will be obvious that so long as a man's utmost endeavours can produce no more than is necessary to feed him there will be no advantage in possessing that man or exercising any control over him. If a work-horse could produce no more than the

cost to you of its food you would have no desire to own that horse. But just as soon as it becomes possible for you to use that horse in such a manner as to produce for you more than the cost of its maintenance, just so soon does that horse become a more or less desirable possession. In like manner, as soon as that stage of development was reached where it was possible for man to produce more than was necessary to maintain him in health and vigor, it became an advantage to possess slaves. The question of who were the first slaves and what was the method of their enslavement, though a matter for curious speculation is of no importance in this connection. Suffice it to state that it was out of such conditions as briefly outlined above that the institution of slavery arose.

Meanwhile, the struggle for existence on the part of mankind, taking the form of still further development of the ability to control natural forces continued. But side by side with it there developed another struggle—the struggle of enslaved and disinherited of the earth against their oppressors. Thus developed "The Class Struggle."

As time went on, further developments of the means and methods of production brought about corresponding changes in the structure of society. Chattel-slavery, in which the slave was the absolute private property of an individual of the ruling class, gave place to Feudal Serfdom, under

which the serf was bound to the land, and whoever owned the land possessed the product of the serf's labor, and more or less power over his life. Still further economic development and Feudalism in turn gave place to capitalism, under which the serf became the wage-laborer, who is bound to the machine of social production and whoever owns the machine, owns the product of the wage laborer, and consequently possesses more or less power over his life.

Thus during all the period of social and economic development, there continued to exist two distinct classes in society—the exploited and the exploiters—and still the class struggle goes on. History is full of manifestations of it. There exists today the written record of a great slave strike, with which no doubt many of you are more or less familiar. It occurred as far back as the fourteenth century B.C. A detailed account of it is to be found in the book called "Exodus." In this strike over a million persons were involved, and not only did they quit work, but they shook the dust from off their feet and went away from the land of Egypt in a body. Some time later, in 1100 B.C., the masons, mortar mixers and hod-carriers—all slaves—engaged in building one of the Egyptian pyramids, staged a nine-hour day strike for more pay—and got it. There are those who would have you believe that you can not be slaves while you have the right to strike. But these men were able to strike and get their demands. And they were slaves. Some of you perhaps imagine that while you have the right to organize you can not be slaves. But there exist today historical records of the fact that some 600 years before the beginning of the Christian era, the workers were granted the right to organize, and did organize—there were great numbers of trade unions in those days—and they were all slaves. Historical records are overflowing with literally hundreds of such strikes as the two I have mentioned. So you see that this business is quite an ancient affair, and has been hanging fire, as it were for ages. It is high time it was settled once and for all, don't you think?

The outcome of the struggle for existence so far as it refers to the struggle against adverse natural conditions, may be safely regarded as an overwhelming victory for man. There is an abundance of evidence of the fact that with modern methods of production, it is possible for man to produce a plentiful supply of the necessities and comforts of life with but comparatively slight effort regardless of natural conditions. And it must be borne in mind that it is the workers of the world who have achieved this result. The whole history of the development of improved methods of production during the era of civilization is bound up in the history of the working class—that class which has produced and still produces everything, and receives but a bare subsistence.

The struggle for existence, so far as the human

(Continued On Page Two.)

WITHDRAW FROM RUSSIA

No Conscription Resolution of the Miners' Federation.

(From "Common Sense," March 29.)

The lies told in the name of Mr. Lloyd George and placarded over the country by Coalition candidates at the General Election have come home to roost. Mr. Churchill's Bill for continuing conscription after the Peace has exasperated the country, which wants to restore honesty and veracity in public life. So on Wednesday the Miners' Federation, after completing its conference on the Government's offer, went on to discuss Mr. Churchill's Conscription Bill, and passed the following resolution:

"That this conference calls upon the Government immediately to withdraw all British troops from Russia, and to take the necessary steps to induce the Allied Powers to do likewise. We further most emphatically protest against the attempt of the Government to fasten conscription on this country by means of the Bill now before Parliament, described as the Naval, Military, and Air Forces' Service Bill, and call upon the Government immediately to withdraw this Bill, or, alternatively, this conference proposes to take such steps in conjunction with the organized Labor movement, both political and industrial, as will compel its withdrawal."