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THE TEMPER OF BRITISH LABOR

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[From the New York "Nation," April 19]

IN order to see the British industrial situation in its true perspective we must consider the labor movement in England with reference to its effect upon modern machine production. From this point of view there can be no doubt that it had been a real burden upon industry. Organized before the automatic machine began the reduction of all factory labor to a single semi-skilled level, the craft unions had for years been enforcing certain rules which held up the normal advance of modern machine production. The labor movement had, in fact, served to protect the skilled worker against this very levelling process; it had maintained him in what might be termed a privileged position. By the rules of these skilled-trade organizations the introduction of certain automatic machines was forbidden, modern efficiency methods were prohibited, a limit to the production of the individual worker was tacitly admitted, and certain processes were reserved for the skilled workers. In short, trade unionism in England aimed primarily at guaranteeing the skilled worker a position at fair terms against the competition of the unskilled worker as the mere tender of a high-speed automatic machine. Only in the great organizations composing the Triple Alliance could one find anything approaching industrial unionism.

But the English industrial situation prior to the war was really an anachronism: High-speed modern industry was marching on, and the productivity of British labor was falling far behind that of such nations as Germany and the United States. The war, with its tremendous appetite for the products of great munitions plants, forced the issue. It offered the employing class a plausible excuse for bringing English industry up-to-date. Under the guise of patriotism the Employers' Association called upon the trade unions to surrender all the concessions which had been forced from employers by a generation of hard-driven bargains. Both sides knew that this would be a dangerous blow to the craft-union movement, that it would cause the skilled worker to sink back into the great sea of the unprivileged, and unprotected proletariat. As a result, the employers were unable to accomplish their purpose except through the agency of government. The Committee on Production, appointed for this purpose, reported that the national emergency required the giving up by labor of its right to strike, of its right to oppose the introduction of the latest efficiency machines and methods, and of its right to maintain lines of demarcation between various groups of workers. The trade-union executives had agreed to co-operate with the government in the conduct of the war; they were, therefore, bound to accept these conditions.

[He then relates some of the new conditions imposed on labor.]... The employers had thus secured the right to press labor to the limit of production. Henceforth there would be but one class of general factory labor, machine tenders, to be used as instruments of the community. A great supply of such labor would exist after the war—a sure guarantee of cheap production. Other results were to follow; yet I have been able to

find only a single voice raised at the time to give warning of these results. In the "Economist" of June 5, 1915, there is the following comment:

In some factories, where the managers are incompetent and are unable to get the best work out of their hands, . . . there is the masters' demand for compulsion. But employers who know the character of the English work people and of the trade unions know that the dangers of compulsion are very much greater than the difficulties which compulsion and bureaucratic interference are supposed to be going to cure. . . . By this means such voluntary organizations as the trade unions might be dealt a deadly blow, and instead of strikes and lockouts when masters and men fall out we shall have class movements and revolutionary movements by armed organizations.

This is a forecast of what is actually happening in England today. The change must have come

BRITISH TROOPS FIGHTING AGAINST SOCIALISM IN BULGARIA

LAST Saturday's papers gave the following Exchange message from Paris:

A telegram from Athens to the "Matin" says: A Bolshevik movement at Varna (the Bulgarian Black Sea port) having been attempted by Socialists and extremists from Sofia, the Allied authorities caused the town to be occupied by British troops, and martial law was proclaimed. All the ringleaders are to be tried by British court-martial and severely punished.

Does Parliament realize what this policy means? Suppose there were a Socialist movement in France, are British troops to be used to suppress it? We are trying to suppress "Socialists and Extremists" in Russia, our late ally, and in Bulgaria, our late enemy. Are we to do the same for our friends or for neutral governments? And if Socialists are to be tried by court-martial in Bulgaria, why not in England and Scotland? Besides, we surely have enough to do in our own empire in India, for example, and Egypt, and in our new conquests, such as Mesopotamia, Palestine, and the German colonies?—"Common Sense," April 16, London England.

inevitably in the course of years, for the automatic machine will not be gainsaid. The day of the great machine proletariat is coming. But the war and the employers' war legislation have hastened the process in England. The Munitions Act, dubbed the "Slave Act" by British workers, marks not only the decline of British trade unionism, but also the beginning of new organization along industrial lines aiming more and more clearly at the conquest of industry by the workers.

Hardly was the act signed before the miners struck in defiance of the law and secured nationalization of the mines for the period of the war. Certain shipyard workers defied the "Slave Act" and went to prison. The threat of a general strike in the industry brought about their release, and the investigation which followed secured the elimination of the imprisonment clause in the act.

[After describing the beginning of the shop-steward movement, he continues]:

In the spring of 1917, despite the demands of a critical military offensive, an important section of the munitions industry was tied up by a great strike led by this same organization of shop stewards. The strikers demanded the withdrawal and modification of the new Munitions Act; in other words, the strike was a political one. This time the trade-union leaders had no need to repudiate the strike; the rank and file through its new organization openly repudiated their leaders. The government threatened drastic action and arrested the strike committee. But, the new organization was now far more complete than it had been in the previous spring, when deportation was carried out with apparent success. The shop committees were organized throughout the whole district, with telegraphic code and a corps of motor dispatch riders. The threat of a general strike brought about the unconditional release of the arrested committee, and an agreement under which the bill was withdrawn and modified.

Out of this situation the report of the Whitley Sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee was born, born simultaneously with the first Bolshevik demonstration in Petrograd. Its purpose was to meet a situation which threatened a similar demand of the British proletariat for a share in the government of industry. The effect of the weakening of trade-union organizations was at last apparent. The problem had become one of restoring the authority of the trade-union leaders without curtailing the real advantages gained by the employer as a result of the war. Trade unionism must be reconstructed to prevent more radical developments. Any general industrial organization must be joint organization. The proposed plan aimed to localize the activity of the shop stewards, to limit it to the consideration of certain matters already subject to trade-union negotiation, and to prevent its becoming a general class movement. A glance at the Whitley report will show that it recommends regularized collective bargaining, and that its chief purpose is to safeguard production against strikes and the opposition of labor to efficiency methods. Excepting in case of a general strike, power and authority, under the Whitley plan, will remain on one side of the table.

How far must the old order go to satisfy the demand of labor for a share in the control of industry? Early in 1917 a machinist organizer for the Birmingham district said: "It must be a real control. We have no desire or intention to be treated at the employers' table like poor relations." Recent events have proved that such a

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