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The British Labor Movement

By Felix Morley
Staff Writer, The Federated Press

AGRICULTURAL UNIONISM Final Article

LONDON.—One of the outstanding and most significant features of the British Labor Movement today is the vigor and unanimity with which agricultural laborers are now lining up side by side with the industrial proletariat. Close to 400,000, or nearly fifty per cent of all the rural workers in Great Britain are now organized in the trade unions working in their behalf, a membership figure approximately double that of a year ago. At the end of 1917 only about 100,000 agricultural laborers were organized.

No less striking than the increase of membership, and to a growing extent bound up with it, is the birth of Socialistic spirit among the farm hands. A few years, and even months ago, all that the downtrodden agricultural workers of Great Britain thought about was an increase of wages which would enable them to sustain their families on a standard of moderate comfort and decency. Today communistic sentiment is a real factor and spreading rapidly. Particularly in Scotland the demand for nationalization of the land is too strong to be longer ignored by the government.

To understand this situation it is necessary to appreciate the present land system in Great Britain, a land system which is more medieval and intolerant than that of any other civilized state. It is a fact, the recognition of which is by no means confined to labor circles, that the position of the English agricultural laborer today is one vital respect worse than it was during the reign of William the Conqueror, over eight hundred years ago. In the year 1085 less than ten per cent of the English agricultural population were completely divorced from land tenure. Today, at a moderate estimate, half of this same population are landless laborers not only with no chance whatever of achieving land ownership, but even without any hope of advancing from an economic and social position which is closely akin to that of the feudal serf. And while it is most marked in the case of the agricultural laborer the injustice of the English land system does not even end with him. A great majority of the so-called farmers, who employ this labor, are only tenant farmers subject to the autocratic control of a tiny minority of landowners who exact tribute from every tenant and rarely interest themselves in practical farming.

A few figures will make the situation clearer. There are at the present time something over 600,000 agricultural laborers of various types in England

and Wales. There are something over 300,000 farmers and live-stock raisers, almost all of them tenants on other people's property. There are about 15,000 large landowners who in the aggregate own eighty per cent of all the land in England and Wales, exact heavy rents from those who till it and give hunting and shooting parties for their friends in return. That, in a nutshell, is the reason of the present agricultural unrest in Great Britain and the reason why "Hodge," as the farm laborer is called is now joining in with the labor movement in tens of thousands. Less than two per cent of those who make their living off the land own eighty per cent of that land and in spite of possessing give little or no service in return.

The first phase of the farm-labor movement in England began in 1833 and is now ending. It was the phase, familiar in all industrial history, in which the serf class in its first blind struggle for something more than a bare subsistence found itself opposed by an alliance of the middle and upper classes. In this case it was the struggle of the unaided farm laborer against an all-powerful combination of tenant farmers and landlords. The second phase promises to be very much shorter than the first and may end in the nationalization of the land in Great Britain. It will be characterized by a fighting alliance of the tenant farmers and their laborers on the one side as opposed to the parasitic landlord class on the other. This alliance is already in working operation in Scotland and is beginning to be formed in parts of England. Its watchword everywhere is "nationalize the land."

While the first agricultural laborers' union was launched in England in 1833 it was many years before organization began to make tangible headway. The chief reason for initial delays was the prompt action of the government, composed largely of "landed gentry," in launching methods of terrorism against a movement in which they rightly saw elements of danger to their comfortable position. It is interesting to note that the methods used in England then were very closely akin to those which seem to be popular in another great English-speaking Democracy today.

The cause of the founding of the union was a warning by the farmers that the current wages of seven shillings (\$1.75) a week would shortly be reduced to six shillings (\$1.50). The action of the government was to throw the six "evil-disposed" officers of this labor fledgling into jail and shortly afterwards to deport them to Australia.

There is not space here to discuss the long, up and down struggle for organization which characterized the history of English agricultural labor from 1833 until the late war. In the main these efforts were unsuccessful; at best the farm worker was difficult to organize, an isolated individual, unable to join his fellows in association as easily as the city worker. And to this fact that the ambitious among the agricultural workers migrated to industrial centers, that those who remained were

CIVIC SERVICE UNION No. 52

On Wednesday, May 12, Sister Lyons was the recipient of a very useful present from the Streets and Engineers Departments in the shape of a beautifully engraved gold wristwatch, together with an illuminated address. The presentation was made by Mr. Dan Alton, who expressed his appreciation of her good services while with the department in a very fitting manner. We shall all be sorry to lose Sister Lyons from our ranks, but we wish her all the happiness and luck in the world, in her new sphere of life.

Congratulations, Bro. Leslie, your choir merited every one of the 82 points that the adjudicators awarded. The standard of work is above the average for winning small choirs.

Two civic employees were conducting choirs in the small choirs competition. Bro. Robt. Cockburn was a member of the winning intermediate choir.

We are wondering whether those sisters who have converted Sunday into washday, have been caught in the Zionist movement. If they have, we would like to know if the Sabbath will be observed in the Orthodox manner.

Cheap skate! Cheap skate! was the cry that some of the boys heard, when entering certain clothing stores. Presumably because they were wearing overalls, they were subjected to this treatment.

The Radial Football team would benefit by a better combination, not only of the team, but of the Civic employees with the team. Get in and be a helping member.

hampered by the lethargy of ignorance, and that oppression of every sort was brought to bear upon the agricultural unions, and it is not surprising that August 1914 found the farm workers in a social position as debased as ever and drawing an average wage in England and Wales of just sixteen shillings (\$4.00) a week.

Two factors have changed this situation almost overnight and account for the strong position of the agricultural today. The first of these is the entrance of the Workers' Union, the most powerful organization in England, entering only to unskilled and casual labor, into the field of agricultural organization. The second factor is found in the passage of the Wheat Production Act, forced through parliament largely by virtue of German U-boat pressure in August, 1917.

When the English agricultural laborer built up his own union he would start with an organization of a dozen or so members and a capital of a few dollars. Growth was slow and the first effort to ameliorate conditions brought pressure from the farmers and landlords, generally resulting in collapse. When the Workers' Union organized a special branch for agricultural labor it started with a membership of a quarter of a million and a bank account of several hundred thousand dollars. Merely by filling out his membership card in the Workers' Union the farmworker found himself linked up with the industrial strength of organized urban labor. This one step brought his ultimate emancipation nearer than eighty years of effort at independent organization had done.

One of the reasons which led the Workers' Union to organize the farm laborers, as told me by George Dallas, in charge of the agricultural organization work, was the problem of having discontented or striking farm workers come to the cities and undercut the unskilled labor there. The reverse of this was also true; time and again when agricultural laborers would attempt a strike against an unfair landlord or farmer the latter would bring in unemployed from the cities to defeat the move. By successfully invading the agricultural field the Workers' Union has effectively protected both its rural and city members from scabbing of this sort, and tremendously strengthened the industrial power of both units. It is noteworthy that the industrial organizers of the Workers' Union have been phenomenally successful in lining up the farm hands as union members.

The importance to the movement of the other factor of success the Wheat Production Act, is found in its clause setting up representative committees throughout the country for the consideration of production, wages and other agricultural problems. On these committees the farm workers have an equal representation with the farmers, which meant in the first place a governmental endorsement of the agricultural workers' union as the only bodies able to elect farm laborers' representatives. Beyond this, however, the power which they exert on these committees have taught the farm laborers and farmers to cooperate and to look forward to the time when agriculture will be a socialized industry free from land-lord control.

At every recent conference of farm laborers, delegates from every county in England have recorded the opinion that "no adequate solution of the rural problem is possible so long as the land is privately owned." In addition a minimum wage, "adequate to promote efficiency" has been established throughout England and Wales by the Wheat Production Act. Last spring this minimum was established for adult male farm workers at the ridiculously in-

FIRE FIGHTERS' LOCAL 209

A number of changes has been made in the staff of the Edmonton Fire Department. Capt. Dutton, No. 2 Hall has been appointed to the position of District Chief. E. R. Murray, No. 5 Hall, has been appointed to the office of Deputy Chief, and Captain Ferguson, recently of No. 7 Hall, has been transferred, in the same capacity, to No. 1 Hall.

In the promotion of Capt. Dutton to the position of District Chief, it is generally conceded that ability and efficiency are, in this instance, coupled with seniority, and that when a severe test comes District Chief Dutton will rise to the occasion and show the coolness and decision that has made him successful as captain of a brigade.

Deputy Chief Murray has an extensive knowledge of the Fire Department, and in his new capacity, will exercise an influence beneficial to the workings of the department in control and efficiency.

Capt. Ferguson, though hardly yet attaining the prime of life, is an old timer as a fire-fighter, has a most successful record, and will receive strong support from his brigade at No. 1.

At the last meeting of our local, it was suggested by Bro. Wilson, No. 1 Hall that the membership fee be increased 100 per cent. This matter will be taken up next meeting.

Bro. Lucas' little boy, aged four years, had the misfortune to rupture himself by a fall, when out playing last Sunday.

adequate figure of thirty shillings a week for a six day week of fifty-four hours in summer and fifty hours in winter.

The Workers' Union has achieved the most remarkable success in organizing the agricultural worker, and is of particular interest because of its successful combination of farm and industrial workers. It is not, however, at present numerally the most important of the rural unions. The Agricultural Laborers' Union, successfully reorganized out of previous failures in 1912, is entirely of, by and for the farm workers, and has an enviable record of successes accomplished both by peaceful negotiation and, where negotiations were spurned, by strikes. In the county of Norfolk this union now exerts such power that no farmer will take on a "hand" unless the latter can show his union card. The A.L.U. now claims a membership of something over 200,000, and is growing steadily. The agricultural section of the Workers' Union numbers 150,000 and is also increasing.

In spite of a certain amount of rivalry there is a close executive harmony between these two bodies. Both are co-operating on the immediate aim of British agricultural labor—a basic 45-hour week with a minimum wage of fifty shillings, provisions which are likely to be forced through the forthcoming Parliament. Both are urging their members to vote the labor ticket and strengthen their political as well as their industrial position, the results of which propaganda are now seen in every by-election in agricultural districts.

The rapid emancipation of the agricultural workers, and the growing co-operation between him and the farmer against the absentee landlord, is one of the most significant features of the of the war. The dukes and earls who new England which has been born out own a majority of England are being faced with two alternatives—either take up agriculture as a serious business or sell out to those who will, and it is noteworthy that for the most part they are choosing the latter course. Mention the sentiment for nationalization of the land and communistic ownership is spreading.

One other factor growing out of the rural activity of the Workers' Union deserves stress. It is the closed co-operation between agricultural and urban labor which is being developed. Something which, combined with the work of the Co-operative Societies, can be developed so as to eliminate the middleman whenever he operates as a food trust, and which is also paving the way towards an equitable food distribution in the cities, particularly valuable in the time of sudden emergency.

PICNIC FOR WIDOWS AND DEPENDENTS OF FORTY-NINTH ASSO.

It has been proposed by the Executive of the Forty-ninth Association to hold a picnic for the Widows, Dependents, and Mothers of men deceased in the Battalion, and in order to assure that none be overlooked we would request that they forward their names, addresses, number of dependents, etc., to C. A. Walker, Hon. Sec., 10742 107th street.

LAUNDRY WORKERS SECURE 25 PER CENT WAGE INCREASE

DETROIT.—Laundry workers of this city have secured a 25 per cent. wage increase through their union organized several months ago.

An agreement has been entered into between the employers and the union which stipulates that better working conditions as well as a pay increase shall prevail next year.

CORRESPONDENCE

(The Free Press takes no responsibility for any opinions expressed in letters to the editor. No letters can be accepted for publication, and will not be printed unless accompanied by name and address of writer.)

Edmonton, May 14, 1920.

To the Editor,
Dear Sir—The following letter lately received by one of Edmonton's taxpayers from Messrs. Hegler Sutherland Delmuge, Ltd., may be said to speak for itself:

Dear Sir—You are hereby notified that from and after the expiration of your present term, May 1st, 1920, the rent on the premises now occupied by you will be \$75.00 per month, but in view of the fact that you are now in possession, we are authorized by the new owner to give you the option of renewing the lease at the rate of \$70.00 per month.

In case you would not care to renew the lease on these terms you will be required to vacate the premises at the end of your present term.

Please let us know by return mail your wishes in this matter.

Yours truly,
HEGLER SUTHERLAND DELMUGE LTD.

Per G.A.S.

Agents for the Owner.

Undoubtedly a bad G.A.S. attack.

This house was let from May, 1919 to May, 1920, at \$57.50 per month. The original owner declared in May, 1919, that at \$30.00 the house barely cleared itself, but at \$37.50 per month was doing well. Nothing like making sure.

This juicy missive is illuminative of the times we live in and will be of vast interest to the workers as an example of how the trick is done. It is an established fact on such evidence that there are proprietors and agents willing to fasten on the very necessities of the worker to such an extent that they demand an increase totally out of proportion with any increase the worker has received.

Thus we suppose the Scripture is fulfilled which sayeth "Unto him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath shall be taken away even that which he hath." If there is such a thing as a culmination of travesties of honor we need look no further for its presentation in type than the missive already quoted. Is the urgent necessity

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of a Fair Rents Act not apparent?

There is no room for any cheap argument such as that "other people are putting rents up" and clap trap of this kind unworthy of decent people. The facts are that organized gangs, whether camouflaged as limited companies, investment trusts or some other name like tinkling cymbals spelling derision and disaster, are out for plunder and willing to fatten on the necessities of the people. That is bed-rock truth and defies the word-artists who would confound the real issue in a thick arbour of leafy verbiage.

"Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." And so on the moral aspect of this wretched picture a still more wretched situation is disclosed. Christ did not in so many words teach "Square deal"—that is modern equivalent for "Do unto others"—but this owner who collects the gold, violates not only Christ's teachings but the elements of fairness.

If there is any spirit left in the Citizens of Edmonton their opportunity is

war is won and we should start right in clear and waiting. The time is ripe, one with a bloodless attack on the troops of harpies who are by various well known and lesser known artifices forcing up rents beyond reason. Let those also who fought for Canada have a little mercy as they struggle to regain a footing in an anciently hospitable country, and for the sake also of those who willingly died for their country let us first do what is right by those for whom they made the sacrifice.

Citizens, how much longer!

LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEER, C.N.R.

Some people are of the opinion that unions are "good" when they do nothing, or when they do only that which pleases their critics. Unions are "bad" when their struggle for humanity and progress and liberty threatens to destroy the special privileges and remove the opportunities for satisfying greed which so many of labor's critics find so delightful.

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