

The Miners and Revolution

REVOLUTION is one of those words that have been subjected to considerable ill usage of late. Every contemplated change in the manner of administering capitalist property is looked upon by the super-optimist as a great revolutionary move. That these people mean well we do not doubt but, then, this concession could be yielded to the most bitter reactionaries of all times. The moral conclusions we may arrive at have no bearing on a scientific analysis. Either those changes are revolutionary or they are not. Let us examine one of them.

Much has been written in the labor press lately concerning the British miners, and their premonitory demands on the Government to nationalize the coal mines. This action has been referred to in glowing terms as conclusive evidence of a great awakening on the part of the miners. We are led to believe that arrayed against them, in this epoch making demand, are all the forces of the State, and every institution of capitalism, especially the press. This line of argument is advanced by some whom we would expect to know better.

Is this really a struggle between those who dig the coal on one side, and the remainder of British Society on the other? Were such the case then much of the rumpus that has been raised on the subject could be charitably condoned. But is it? For the sake of getting closer to the matter let us look at the situation at home. "Distance lends enchantment to the scene," said someone who might easily have made a bigger mistake. In this country the demand for government control and ownership of the basic industries is not a new one. Neither is this demand confined exclusively to those who produce in the industries in question. Railway workers we know have petitioned the powers that be to take over the means of transportation as a State concern, but they have not been alone in such action. A very large section of the American public, including some of our most prominent capitalists and financiers, incline to the same view. So, too, with the coal mines of the U. S.

The capitalist press has by no means unanimously opposed the project. In fact the Hearst papers, which constitute a very important section of the American press, have adopted the slogan, "Government ownership of public utilities," and rapid strides are being made in this direction.

Similarly in the case of Britain, the tendency is for the larger industries—the means of transportation, and communication, as well as the machinery of production in other lines which is outgrowing the competitive stage, to centralize in the hands of the State. The necessity for such action was clearly demonstrated during the war. Government control was the result in many industries. It was really the only possible kind of control. The national welfare made it imperative that the nation's resources and key industries, be conducted by the nation itself instead of by private individuals or "soul-less" corporations.

Now, more than ever, the problems of the Reconstruction Period demand, in the interest of the common welfare, an extension of State control in order to co-ordinate the national resources, and secure the maximum production. In the coal industry, in particular, many of the shrewdest minds in Britain are coming to understand that private ownership is out of the question.

In 1913 Great Britain exported coal to the amount of \$77,000,000, while the possibilities for 1920 are, according to those in a position to know, only \$7,000,000. The reasons for this great decrease in exportation rests, primarily on the fact that Britain's coal reserves are disappearing and her industrial future would be jeopardized should her former rate of export continue and secondarily, on that great labor unrest which resulted in curtailing production. Private ownership, even under government control, have proved inefficient because private interests have incessantly interfered with this control and made successful operation an impossible feat.

Sufficient proof to offset the theory of our "any-

kind-of-actionists," that the miners are opposed in their attitude by the entire Capitalist class, can be seen in the fact that the Sankey Commission which reported favorably on government ownership of coal mines was not a proletarian committee, but a body comprising men of influence and affluence. The debates in the House of Commons reveal that even there, are ardent supporters of the contemplated change. Even the aristocratic mine owners who appeared before the Commission of Enquiry took the stand that they would first require to see the bill that involved nationalization of coal mines before they would give their opinions on the feasibility of the move. Their premonition that nationalization might be synonymous with confiscation resulted in extreme caution being displayed.

Of course, the argument may be adduced that, even with this evidence to the contrary, the fact remains that the majority of capitalist spokesmen both in Parliament and out have voiced opposition to the scheme. We grant this. But is not history replete with cases where the benefits to be derived from changes in the mode of administration have not been suddenly noticed by those who would benefit most? It would not be necessary to travel very far back to find proof of this. The bourgeois mind is essentially conservative, and looks askance on any drastic moves until dire necessity compels it.

But how about the miners themselves? What have they to gain by a change of masters? How will it materially affect them whether the Earl of Bull Durham and Lord Limburger, own the mines separately or jointly? The miners are wage slaves before the change, and there is not a remote possibility that they would be anything else after the deed was done. We can find abundant evidence in the operation of government controlled utilities on this continent to justify us making the assertion that a movement with this object in view has no place in the program of an intelligent working class.

Exploitation has been carried on in the railway industry during the past two years to as great an extent as before. The list of the killed and injured shows no abatement, and the mere fact that the casualties were according to the law is little consolation to those who were maimed for life. So with the miners. Given nationalization they will find their masters organized on a larger scale, and should a strike be called and anything pertaining to violence resorted to they are up against the armed forces of the nation without even such an intermediary as today exists, in the various courts of law, to assist them in defining their legal status.

We have only to glance at the results of the general election held in Britain a little over a year ago to get a clear idea of the worker's awakening. Any candidate who presented himself on that occasion had to demonstrate his loyalty to the Crown, and all that stands for, before he was considered a fit and proper representative of British labor. Although the Labor Party on that occasion increased its representation in the House of Commons, still it was the safe and sane element of the Party that secured election, and those who were outspoken in opposition to the capitalist policy, or even luke-warm in its advocacy, were left at home to nurse their wrath or mend their ways.

An example of this can be seen in the case of McLeah, of Glasgow, who was snowed under by a vote of two to one, and even the support he did receive was due in a large measure to the fact that he contested a constituency where foreigners composed a large percentage of the electorate.

The ridiculous nature of the miners' demands are clearly portrayed when we stop to consider that while they are clamoring for nationalization they are still willing and ready to elect their masters to power to control the industries, and defeat their every attempt to gain any advantage on the industrial field. Whatever action the forces of the State have taken to suppress the miners' activities in cases of strikes, such was only made possible by the ignorance of those who by their votes placed these forces under capitalist control.

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THE SOLDIERS' PROBLEMS.

were ever dreamt of by those whose anxiety about civilization has now turned to the problems of reconstruction, and who ignore the fact that the basis they now figure upon for their reconstruction is entirely different to the one on which their civilization shook only a few years ago.

These vast masses of men were removed across the seas and became subject to the rigorous discipline of European conditions, to which they became adjusted with more or less success. A good deal of loose talk prevailed about what the Colonial troops would not stand for in matters of discipline. Those who have had experience with them know just what such talk is worth and the special disciplinary institutions of the British army can supply authentic stories of the methods resorted to to bring raw Colonial troops into "line." The fact that an army was a machine was soon convincingly demonstrated to the romantic soul who had been anxious about civilization's dangers. Hand in hand with this knowledge he had it gradually borne in upon him that even his sacred religious organisations were peculiarly adapted to the military institutions that surrounded him on all sides. Everything was for sale to him who had the price, from replacements of kit to socks knitted by "patriots" for him and his comrades in arms. It seemed that the atmosphere of "graft" could not be eliminated from those engaged in "The Great Adventure." Profit seemed to be the be all and end all. At times his newspapers informed him it was men who would win the war; later it transpired it was money, and when it was all over he could hear in his Y. M. C. A. canteens that it was Lloyd George, General Haig, or Admiral Somebody-else who won the war, and lastly the men in the trenches.

To some extent, though not quite generally, it dawned on their consciousness that individually they certainly could not claim to have won anything, yet collectively they certainly had been in it somewhere. Lo and behold, they return to their "home" again, and find that as individuals their part is buried deep in the experiences of many, and the idea of collectivist action comes to the surface again when it becomes evident another battle is pending in connection with that livelihood which caused so much anxiety before.

It had seemed that the efforts with the agencies of military force were going to preserve their right to a livelihood for ever and ever, but alas, reconstruction plans only appear to be a vague attempt to twist conditions around so that some kind of job is to be forthcoming in order that "profits" may still flow into other hands than theirs. The possibility of once again looking for uncertain employment does not seem far beyond the horizon.

They have had a glimpse into the much advertised Golden Dream of Labor in England and the "fabulous" wages paid have melted before their eyes as they watched them expend their earnings in living expenses. Their newspapers had prepared them for wonderful sights in Europe of the democratic changes brought about by the war and they have seen and are not overjoyed.

There is a bitter taste in the mouth of those who went to save civilization. When they return they have to organise to secure What? and from Whom?
H. W.

We have no doubt that the economic development of Britain, as of all countries, is materially assisting in bringing to the minds of the workers a growing consciousness of their class position. This is natural. But this class enlightenment is not illustrated in attempts to merely change the form of capitalist ownership, and those who endorse such action are only adding to the confusion that prevails. We should display a little more intelligence even if it be at the expense of a little enthusiasm.

J. A. McD.