

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Fight or Submission.

(On the Mining Dispute in Great Britain).

By A. Lozovsky.

It is at present hard to say whether, on the 1st of May, there will break out the titanic struggle of the British coal miners against the mine owners. It is difficult to say because the reports which have arrived up till now are extremely contradictory, and also because, during the last two or three months, there has taken place a certain re-grouping of forces between the two opposing parties. On the one hand the entire English bourgeoisie, with Mr. Baldwin, "who stands outside of all parties" at the head, is conducting with a very clear and definite allocation of roles, a tenacious and bitter attack upon the working class, in which it is supported by a certain section of the leaders of the Labour Party and of the trade unions. On the other hand there is an insufficiently united labour movement, divided by craft unionism and political differences, the right leaders of which are pressing for an understanding at all costs.

One must do justice to the British bourgeoisie. Its plan of attack has been drawn up according to all the rules of the art. After Mr. Baldwin was compelled in July last year to beat a retreat, a Royal Commission was appointed in which the big bankers and industrialists predominated, and which in the course of many months studied and elaborated the question of how best to hoodwink the miners.

What was the question in dispute? The whole question has continually turned on the conclusion of a national wages agreement; but the proposal of the royal Commission provides for district agreements, whereby, in certain districts, wages are to be reduced by 20 and 30% and in other localities, on the other hand, even a increase can be allowed if the result is an average

reduction of 10%. The object of this plan is to drive a wedge into the ranks of the miners, to set one district against the other and thereby to break the backbone of the most important section of the British proletariat.

These plans of the Royal Commission, which have received the approval of the mine owners, would not be so terrible for the workers if the trade union movement in Great Britain were strongly welded together, and if at the head of the Labour Party there were not such friends of the "national interests" as Mac-Donald, Thomas, Clynes and Co. The first reports of the findings of the Commission had scarcely appeared when these agents of the bourgeoisie commenced to work in order to persuade the miners, who still stood firm, to give up resistance. Everything was set in motion, including open attacks as well as intriguing behind the scenes, and a number of special methods to which the degenerate parliamentarians of the British Labour Party are specially addicted.

This persistent work of the open and secret friends of the British mine owners brought hesitation, vacillation and uncertainty into the ranks of the leading organs of the British trade union movement. Instead of, in the last few months seeing to it that the entire proletariat of Great Britain was prepared for the conflict which will break out on the 1st of May, instead of centring the entire propagandist, agitational and organisatory work upon this tremendous encounter between the classes, and to mobilise the whole labour movement of Great Britain, numbering many millions — instead of all this there took place unofficial conferences, and in secret sittings the proposals of the Right, not to fight but to capitulate, were discussed. All these meetings behind closed doors were, of course not kept secret from the British bourgeoisie, which has its agents everywhere. This encouraged the mine owners and they undertook a number of fresh attacks.

All the reports from Great Britain go to show that the greatest indignation prevails among the miners. The working masses will have nothing to do with talk of concessions. In these circumstances the fight between the miners and the mine owners is unavoidable. The situation in Great Britain at present is such that the miners alone would not secure a victory without serious support by the larger trade unions and by the Central Council of the British Trade Union Congress, for the forces are not equal: on the one side there stands the entire British bourgeoisie, the whole State apparatus, strike-breaking corps of all kinds etc. Will the railway workers, the transport workers and the General Council come to the aid of the miners? There exists a formal promise of support, but whether this support will be realised in practice, whether the transport workers, the railway workers (we must not forget that the General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen is the notorious J. H. Thomas) etc. will enter on a solidarity strike, is at present very difficult to say.

If the Right wing of the Labour Party and the Right wing of the General Council of the British Trade Union Congress had not carried on a disintegrating, demoralising and defeatist policy in the last two or three months, had these advocates of capitulation not everywhere called attention to the "unprejudiced attitude" of Mr. Baldwin, the acceptability of the proposals of the Royal Commission, the futility of fighting, the advantage of losing a little without a struggle instead of losing a great deal in a struggle, then the bourgeoisie of Great Britain would have learned a lesson on the 1st of May which it would not forget in a hurry. But now, when a new Black Friday is being prepared by the Right wing of the Labour Party and by the Right wing of the General Council, (they are one and the same elements), we are justified in regarding with anxiety the state of affairs in Great Britain, for the fate of the entire British proletariat is at stake.

We are following events in Great Britain with considerable uneasiness, for on this section of the British coal front the workers will again have to fight a battle against united capital, against the bourgeois State and the Right leaders of the British labour movement.

We know that the British miners, in their overwhelming majority, will not hear of submission, that they are ready for a struggle. They can be assured of the warmest sympathy and of the unreserved support of the revolutionary workers of the whole world — the Conference of Action of the Minority Movement has shown this in Great Britain itself —, for the victory of the British miners is our victory, their defeat, however, is our defeat. Therefore, every honest proletarian will be in favour of a fight to the end, until victory is attained.