

In THE COLONIES

A Letter from South Africa

By Tom Mann.

I have put in three months in South-Africa, endeavoring to stimulate the workers to further efforts in spite of the exceptional difficulties that surround them.

Readers may be aware that the Gold Mine Magnates of the Transvaal determined in the early weeks of 1922 to introduce low paid native labor, and did so, replacing over four thousand whites by blacks; the blacks being paid about one fifth of the amount paid to the whites. The determined resistance displayed by the whites to this lowering of the standard, brought about the activities generally referred to as the "revolution". It resulted in much shooting, a number were killed on both sides, over 5,000 were arrested. After a few weeks many of these were released, and the others placed on trial, many being tried for treason by a special Treason Court, consisting of three judges, against whose decision there was no appeal. These judges sentenced four to be hanged, and notwithstanding protest and appeals they were hanged. Since then they have sentenced eleven others to death, but these have since been reprieved. Some four hundred others have yet to be tried.

Seeing that among those arrested and those already sentenced, are some of the most capable and loyal militants, it is natural that a spirit of depression has come over many who feel comparatively helpless in the absence of their more courageous workmates. As a result, the Unions are seriously weakened, leaders are in prison, rank and file are out of work and boycotted.

Although the output of the mines is said to be nearly normal, there are eight thousand adult male white miners unemployed on the Witwatersrand, and there is no hope of these obtaining employment again in South Africa; in addition there is a similar number of young men, sons of these whites, for whom there is no prospect of employment. Then there are the young Dutchman, who, in increasing numbers are seeking to get into industry, including the mines, as there is no land for them, and economic pressure compels them to seek some occupation other than farming. Many of these drift about and become part of what is known as "the poor whites", a body of men, mostly Dutch, with little knowledge of how to work, and very little opportunity of work of any kind, other than relief work, at a cheap rate, on railway or other public work.

Then there is the great problem of the colored men, not so pressing in the Transvaal as yet, but a most serious problem in the Cape, Natal and Free State provinces. The term "Colored", means those who have some white blood in them—not the Natives. These colored men show great aptitude in learning trades; also in organizing themselves and holding their own; but among the Whites there is yet much prejudice.

Below these comes the almost universal laborer, the native. My endeavor has been to promote a sound method of industrial organization, inspired by Communism. I have sought to discourage old time sectional methods and tried to bring into existence a broader and better system based on industrial working class solidarity. All my meetings have been successful, and I have always carried resolutions for industrial solidarity and for Communism, by an eighty five per cent majority, but although I have held over fifty meetings, it is only a small section of the proletariat that I have been able to reach.

The political Labor Party here has just decided, on the advice of its petty-bourgeois leader, to eliminate its plainly declared Objective calling for the "Socialization of Industry", as being quite unnecessarily outspoken and causing fear and alarm as to what the Labor Party intends.

The Communist cells are not numerous. There is a group in each industrial centre, and in Johannesburg and Cape Town they carry on a regular educational campaign. Internationalism is kept well to the front by the Communists; in Durban there is a group of Social Democrats who try to be loyal to old associations but who find themselves nearer to the Communist camp than to any other.

A keen interest is shown as to developments in Russia. The capitalist press never tires of besmirching Russia and it has here, as elsewhere, published malicious statements served up hot for the occasion, utterly oblivious to truth. This I have been able to deal with effectively at all meetings, but naturally the press reaches those I cannot.

The Social Revolution is not able to assert itself in a country like South Africa till some really representative European country sets the pace; but as soon as this takes place I shall count upon the workers of South Africa finding ways and means of travelling on the high road to Communism. Meanwhile an increasing number are qualified to be of service in the right direction when the crucial hour arrives. From my recent experiences here I am satisfied that when Sovietism is accepted by Germany or Britain, South Africa will go the whole way also. The Capitalist system is as big a failure here as anywhere on earth. Speed the day when it shall make way for another regime worthy of a true civilization, one that shall afford ample scope for men of all colors, subject to one stipulation only,—every able bodied man to do a share of work.