

# NATIVE WORKERS' T. U. MOVEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

By T. Reed.

The native labor movement of South Africa during the last quarter of 1928 was distinguished by a number of events which once more brought this movement into the centre of attention of the country. In October the native workers in one of the Government enterprises, the experimental veterinary station in Pretoria, declared a strike. The workers of the Station, who are practically all united in the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, demanded wage increases and nominated for the negotiations with the management a delegation in which two representatives of the local union branch participated. The management, however, acting according to the directions from the Ministry for Agriculture, emphatically refused to permit the representatives of the Union to negotiate and then issued an order to dismiss all members of the delegation. This served as the pretext for the declaration of the strike of 75 workers, union members. Immediately after the non-turn up of the workers at the station, a company of police arrived, and by threats of arrests attempted to force the workers to call the strike off. The workers refused to submit and were immediately arrested and sent to prison. After several days imprisonment the workers were sentenced to pay a fine of 10/- each, and upon return to the station they were all dismissed.

Such is the short shift meted out to the native workers upon their first attempt at organised action during the past year. Even the elementary standards of law, which have been established by these same authorities were violated.

As the experimental station is a Government enterprise and all these actions were taken upon the immediate directions of the given ministry, by these actions the Government in no uncertain sense showed how it intends to react to analogous action by the native workers, and what is its attitude towards the activities of the native Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union.

When Kadalie, the Secretary of the Union, arrived at the scene of the strike, he was, under threat of arrest not even permitted to set foot on the territory of the station.

Thus, all the services of the leaders of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in class collaboration, all their assurances that the union is being reorganised on a purely trade unionist basis and has the task of improving the position of the native workers by "constitutional means" (this in a country where constitution signifies for the black workers complete disenfranchisement and ruthless exploitation), all their endeavours to carry favour with the employers by expulsions of Communists from the Union --- all this was of no avail and did not help them in getting the recognition of their right to participate in the settlement of the dispute which involved the native workers and union members.

Directed in its native policy by the criers of "Native Danger", the Government of the bloc of the Nationalist-Labor Party has proved that it prefers to break up any and all, even the most moderate, movement of native workers.

The more "sober" ones in the camp of the South African bourgeoisie during the lively polemics in the press, which started in connection with the strike, were not able to escape the impression.

with the events at the veterinary station, beat an alarm as to the Government pushing the native workers into the embrace of the Communists by such an attitude towards the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, and expressed an opinion that it was necessary to consider whether "the organisation (ICU) promises to become as a safety valve in cases of dissatisfaction of native workers". The press of the South African Party (a Party representing the interests of British commercial and industrial bourgeoisie on its part, gives an emphatically positive reply to this question.

The other action taken by the native postal workers, who demanded from the Ministry wage increases and general improvement of the conditions of labor is in the closest connections with the Pretoria Strike. This action has become especially important in view of the fact that it was the immediate cause of the subsequent ministerial crisis and the resignation of Madeley, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, member of the "Left" Wing of the South African Labor Party, and the only representative of that Wing in the Cabinet.

After Madeley, under the pressure of the South African Trade Union Congress (white), to which the I.C.U. had appealed for assistance, had commenced negotiations on the position of native postal workers with the ICU and Congress delegation, the Prime Minister Hertzog requested him to resign in view of the fact that his attitude towards the ICU was not in conformity with that of the Government and did not accord with the position taken up by the Minister of Agriculture in connection with the recent strike in Pretoria. As Madeley refused to resign, Hertzog resolved to carry out his line to the end, himself resigned, and then once more accepted the post of Prime Minister, forming a new Cabinet, leaving out Madeley, who was replaced by Sampson, a member of the chauvinist Cresswell Group, which had split off from the Labor Party. As regards Madeley's stand, it was only to be noted that the significance of this Left gesture taken by him should not be overestimated. That his action (negotiations with the ICU) is nothing but a Left gesture, is proved by the whole subsequent policy of the "Left" group of the Labor Party, to which Madeley belongs and which now, on the eve of the Parliamentary elections, is once more seeking rapprochement with the Cresswell Group, as without the united forces of both groups their chances are exceedingly small at the elections.

All this characterises the conditions in which the native labor movement of South Africa develops. And it becomes clear that only by revolutionary action, despite the inevitability of heavy losses, only by overcoming all conciliatory reformist tendencies, will the native labor movement of South Africa be able to develop successfully and strengthen its ranks.