

FIGHT AGAINST CAPITALIST RATIONALI- SATION, FOR THE 7-HOUR WORK DAY!

NATIVE RAILWAYMEN'S STRIKE IN EAST LONDON, SOUTH AFRICA .

Last January a strike broke out among the native railwaymen and dockers of East London, one of the ports in South Africa. Although it was a purely local strike which lasted two weeks, the men being defeated, it was significant for it pointed to the growing class struggle in South Africa, the radicalisation of the native working masses and the widening gulf between them and the opportunist leadership who still control the native TU movement.

Briefly, the history of the strike was as follows: the natives employed in the port and on the railroad receive only three shillings a day although most of them have seen many years service. The Independent Union of Commercial and Industrial Employees, which enrolls these

workers, decided to demand higher wages, of six shillings and six pence per day. When this demand was turned down by the administration the workers came out on strike on January 16th. Steps were immediately taken to smash the strike. Scabs were recruited chiefly from among the white workers who were placed under the protection of strong police and special contingents of ex-servicemen organised to suppress the outbreak of any disturbances. All kinds of false and misleading rumors were circulated by the press, to the effect that the strike had broken down and that natives as well as white workers were only too glad to take the jobs left by the strikers. But when this campaign brought no results (for the strikers stood solidly together); the Government arrested the Strike Committee, headed by Cadalie, the leader of the Union. All the committee members were arrested on the charge of inciting the workers to violence, which prompted Cadalie, alarmed at the possible consequences of such a charge, to call off the strike. He urged the workers to return to their jobs and to make collections to defend the arrested men. Cadalie's treachery simply demoralised the strikers with the result that only a few men, mostly dockers, continued the fight, the rest returning.

Having already thrown the Union of Commercial and Industrial Employees into the arms of Amsterdam, Cadalie did his best to keep the strike within "legal bounds". He used his influence to bind the workers hand in foot, and stamped out all signs of militancy. All he did was to threaten that if his conditions were not conceded, he would call a general strike and organise picketing. But he did neither the one, nor the other. As a matter of fact, in his messages to the strikers he told them to go about their business peacefully and not resort to violence against any one. He appealed to the bourgeois authorities and to Parliament demanding that the Governor General of South Africa intervene, thus creating the impression that the representative of British imperialism was an impartial judge, standing above the classes whom the workers could safely trust with their interests.

But the bourgeoisie gave the workers a taste of the class struggle. They simply derided all Cadalie's appellations and judicial niceties, they mobilised the police and the ex-servicemen and recruited a sufficient number of scabs. In fact, the Government did not even deign to reply to Cadalie, haughtily announcing unofficially that the articles of the law cited by Cadalie apply only to the whites and not to the natives. Knowing full well that Cadalie would never put his threat into effect, the authorities decided to attack. The whole Strike Committee was promptly arrested. They succeeded in getting Cadalie, immediately after his arrest, to tell the workers that the strike was ended and that they would have to return to work. No wonder the most class-conscious section of the workers who supported Cadalie, were dissatisfied with the turn the movement had taken: They decided to continue the fight. But this decision proved futile since the workers had already been demoralised by Cadalie's action.

The attitude of the other reformist organisations to the strike is very instructive. The South African Trade Union Congress, the TU center of the white workers did nothing at all to help the native workers. When Cadalie called the Congress that white workers were scabbing, Andrews, the Secretary of the Congress, coolly replied that he could do nothing and that the telegram would be discussed at the next meeting of the Congress Executive Committee. Amsterdam, too, turned a deaf ear. When the strike started, Cadalie appealed for help to the Amsterdam International Secretariat and to the International Transport Workers' Federation. No reply was received from Amsterdam, while the I.T.F. requested additional information. But when the "additional information" had been furnished, Cadalie requesting that £ 200 be forwarded, he got no reply.

As far as one can judge from the bourgeois press we regret to say that neither the Communist Party of South Africa, nor the Non-European Trade Union Federation showed any interest in the strike or took any steps to help the men. The fact that the strikers at the meetings were urging that it was time to "cut the cackle" and get down

to business, and that although the position was hopeless many workers still continued to strike after it had been officially called off, shows that there is a fine revolutionary spirit, lacking organised expression, among the rank and file.

Although it was defeated the strike proved a good lesson for the workers. It unmasked the reformist leadership and exposed bourgeois legality for what it was. It is a lesson that the workers will do well to remember during the impending struggles in South Africa with the development of the economic depression.

In South Africa, the objective conditions are very favourable for the development of a strong revolutionary movement. The new leadership of the class unions must put an end to the inaction and inertia which have been such a prominent feature in the Federation so far; it is about time to get down to the organisation of the broad masses of unorganised workers, giving special attention to the basic industries and agriculture.