

An Empire in Its Death Throes

by Jay Lovestone



MR. MACDONALD GOES BOLDLY, FORWARD—another "Bejay" cartoon.

scrap heap of history. Britain, as an imperialist empire, is in its death throes, but it is far from dead yet. It will take some time before its grave, now being dug, will be filled with its ruins.

ENGLAND IN DISTRESS

"Great Britain is now in the deepest economic abyss in living memory. I have never known trade to be so bad as during the past few months," said Lord Inchcape, great shipping magnate, the other day. A glimpse at British trade statistics is enough to show that the Lord is telling the truth this time. The Board of Trade statistics show that in 1930 the volume of Great Britain's overseas trade was much lower than in 1924. Allowing for the fall in prices, the value of world exports increased over 30% while the proportion of the United Kingdom has markedly declined.

England, proud home of the Industrial Revolution, is today suffering considerably from inadequate machinery and organization of industry. But improvement in this direction is no hope. We need but turn to the United States and Germany where the present crisis grows out of and was actually precipitated by the huge development of technique, machinery and mass production. The American and the German capitalists are hopeless before the problem of finding work and wages for the great mass of workers. But the British exploiters are still helpless before the pro-

itive and restrained *London Economist* insists on a minimum 10% wage cut all-round. The miners, the weavers, the textile workers are among those who have already suffered worst. 600,000 railroad workers are now facing a severe cut and the abolition of the guaranteed day and week work which they won in the heroic struggles of 1919-1920. 800,000 builders are in the same boat. 200,000 workers were recently locked out in the Lancashire mills. Everywhere the exploiters are desperately trying to rob the workers of conditions won thru years of bitter and costly struggle.

The main engine of the bosses' onslaught against the workers is the government—today, a so-called Labor Government. When 150,000 Welsh coal diggers rebelled, it was the MacDonald government which pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for the employers and cleverly put over a wage cut. The Coal Mines Act is no longer to run in South Wales and the protection of wage guaranteed by the Act is ended.

Of course the most miserable fiasco of the MacDonald government is in its bankruptcy in the unemployment field. Not only has unemployment been increasing by leaps and bounds since May 1929, the advent of the Labor Party Government, but the Unemployment Insurance Act has been so revised as to deprive over 300,000 jobless of benefits. Today, the



LIB. and LAB-LIB.

MACDONALD POLICE PROTECTING SCABS



blem of first getting adequate machinery and then worrying how it should be used and about the displacement resulting from machinery displacing labor.

The crisis of British capitalist economy is rooted in the changed world situation after the war. Great Britain fought Germany for primacy in the world market and lost her supremacy to American imperialism instead. Thus, today, England, once the world's banker, manufacturer, and shopkeeper, is in acute difficulties over the problem of gold reserve readjustments, the question of war debts, and over an ever-worsening industrial and trade position.

The world price collapse has hit Britain especially hard—22% from 1924 to September 1929 and headlong downward since. For this there are two reasons. First of all, the huge international debt flowing from the war. Secondly, the British industrial organization is inelastic and, in comparison with such competitors as the United States and Germany, is technically backward. Thus, 1930 saw a record number of bankruptcies in Great Britain—8000.

Here we have the cancerous curse of unemployment. Mass unemployment is not only chronic but it is constantly growing. In the Christmas—New Year's week the jobless army rose by 234,756. Since the Labor Party took office unemployment has more than doubled. The weekly increase in this period is about 20,000. At this moment the total number of jobless workers is admitted to be 2,643,127. This is the worst in the history of England and compares with 2,580,429, the previous peak reached in the 1921 crisis. To ward off immediate starvation, the workers are granted a pittance of \$7.30 a week for a family of four. The annual total cost of this miserable assistance is constantly rising and has already passed \$520 million—or about four times the yearly British war debt payments to the United States. And this despite the fact that no benefits are received by a worker during the first six weeks of unemployment, the "waiting period".

THE ONSLAUGHT AGAINST THE WORKERS

Worst in the world market and faced with growing revolts in India, Egypt, and Palestine, British imperialism has intensified its attacks on the workers at home. Mountainous waves of wage cuts are engulfing the toiling masses in the British Isles. Even the author-

Public Assistance Committee, is working overtime to cut down relief and to impose task work on the unemployed. All of Snowden's economies are at the expense of the workers. Next to unemployment, the Labor Party, before its election victory, bragged most about what it would do to repeal the Conservative Party's Trade Dispute Bill or anti-strike law. The new bill pushed thru by MacDonald is unimportant and confusing. And the Liberals are sure that it will be mauled and completely castrated in the committee.

In its foreign policy, the Labor Government has been as sturdy a champion of the ruling class as at home. Here, however, it has been more successful in camouflaging its mailed fist. Take the recent Round Table Conference on India. Under cover of loose talk about friendship and freedom for India, MacDonald has arranged satisfactory "safeguards" for British imperialism. The Viceroy is to control defense, finances, foreign relations "as well as emergency powers to insure the tranquility of the State." Egypt, Palestine, South Africa, Australia, Europe, the Naval Conference, all tell the same story of the tireless efforts of the MacDonalds, the Hendersons, the Snowdens in behalf of the British Empire reared and built on the blood and misery of the working and colonial masses.

THE OUTLOOK

The Labor Party is still in power only because the Liberals are not yet ready for a new election and the Conservatives are not yet finished sharpening their knives against the workers. The Liberals have been acting as a sort of a lightning rod for Tory thunderbolts. The Labor Party as the spokesman of British imperialism today is a symbol of the decline of this once world's mightiest capitalist empire. Actually, MacDonald is carrying out an anemic Liberal policy—the price for being kept in office.

But, of course, the majority of the working class does not see this yet. Then, the policies of the official Communist Party which have reduced its membership to 1000-1500 at the outside, are playing into the hands of the MacDonalds and Hendersons. The crop of new revolutionary unions in England presents an even more pitiful picture than in the United States. The once-powerful Minority Movement is paralyzed and is a very faint shadow of its former self. This under conditions where the Soviet Union and Communism are drawing more attention and interest and are more popular than in many a year in the ranks of British labor!

In its period of decline, especially because it is so hard hit in the present world economic crisis, England is soon to enter a period of great and sharp class struggles. The recent strike of 92,000 Scotch miners, 150,000 Welsh miners, and 20,000 weavers in Burnley are only petty ripples compared with the strike wave that is now being prepared—primarily by the critical conditions themselves. In their first stage the new struggles will be defensive. There are good chances of the railroad workers and builders firing the opening gun of working-class resistance to the present capitalist offensive. Once the class war breaks out on a wide front in England, we can look forward to powerful hammer blows being struck against the British exploiters.

Decisive days are approaching in England. Deep-going political changes are in the making. For us who are fighting against that monstrous imperialism which has taken the place of Great Britain, the coming events in England will be of extraordinary significance.