

The Pressure From Below

By J. T. MURPHY.

Communist Party of Great Britain.
TWO events of this week serve to show that the working class movement of this country will not tolerate for long the position of accepting things only by the kind permission of the enemy. These two incidents will also make it perfectly clear that the Labor Government of His Majesty George V. is something distinct from the Labor Party.

First, there is the sequel to the famous twenty hours' discussion on the Anglo-Russian Treaty. The lengthy discussion itself was an innovation. Poor Mr. Ponsonby! Poor Foreign Office officials! The hours rolled on. There was not the slightest sign that these ~~un~~ined Russians would ever get tired. Sweat began to roll down Mr. Ponsonby's face. He flung in an ultimatum, but it was no use. Rakovsky side-stepped and plunged him into further discussion. The officials were getting irritable. It was annoying that they should be kept out of bed so long. Would the Russians never stop debating.

A Working Class Issue.

Point after point had been conceded. Heaven only knows how many amendments had been made to the original draft. And then came the famous clause fourteen, the last stumbling block at this stage of the negotiations. The Russians would not give way. Impossible, says Mr. Ponsonby. We cannot give way any further. He was physically beaten. The Russian delegation seemed just as fresh as when they began, smiling, arguing, giving nothing away. They were used to it. What is a twenty-hour session to Russians, anyway? But for Britishers, it is just awful. The stiff collars began to soften. Tempers began to develop. Nerves were on edge. And bang! The conference broke up on the question of compensation for confiscated property. What an issue with which to face a working audience!

Then the sequel. Some foreign office idiot rushed into print with the statement that the conference had broken down and negotiations were ended. But the last word does not, and did not lay with the Foreign Office. The Labor Party Executive met with a number of the labor members of Parliament. Prominent among them were George Lansbury, Dick Wallhead, and Purcell, the chairman of the General Council of the Trades

Union Congress. They knew quite well that to face the labor movement with a rupture on the question of the Anglo-Russian negotiations was a serious matter for everyone concerned. They knew quite well that the whole working class movement of Britain was thoroly united against Liberals and Tories alike on this question. They realized that the Labor Government had created many misgivings and much dissatisfaction by its manifest leanings to the bondholders and property mongers. Besides each of them had repeatedly pledged themselves to support the demands of the Russian Workers' Government. They were thoroly annoyed and in no mood for taking any nonsense from Ponsonby or anybody else. They asked Comrade Rakovsky to explain the cause of the break-down. Then they listened to Ponsonby. The Russian formulae and the British formulae were put to the vote and the Russian formulae was unanimously agreed to. To have done any other would have been to desert the entire working class both of Britain and Russia. The decision was communicated to Ponsonby, and Purcell, and Wallhead in addition threatened that if the government did not at once re-open negotiations and accept this position they would resign their seats and fight a by-election on the issue of the Anglo-Russian negotiations, and Wallhead would appeal to the whole of the I. L. P. to fight the government on the question.

Reverse English.

Within a few hours engines were reversed. The negotiations were re-opened. The treaty was signed and the healthiest fight since the Labor government was formed, took place against the Liberal and Tory opponents. For the first time since the last general election there was the development of class feeling, a consciousness that a class issue had been raised and was likely to be blazed thruout the country.

Right in the midst of the muddle caused by the Labor Government's too great concern for the people of property came the arrest of the Communist editor of the Workers' Weekly for an appeal to the soldiers, sailors and armen to stand by their brothers in the industrial army of the working class. Questions were raised in the Parliament. The Communist Party Executive had acted promptly. It not only accepted full responsibility for the articles in the Workers' Weekly but challenged the

Labor leaders by means of an open letter to the labor members of Parliament to either line up with us or be exposed as hypocrites before the working class.

The arrest of Campbell had struck a responsive note thruout the whole movement. The fact that he was a wounded soldier and had been thru the worst hells of the war both in France and Gallipoli, and was decorated for bravery, added an immense amount of sympathy to the declarations. Protests began to pour in from every direction. It was obvious that we had proclaimed the right message on the anniversary of the war and that the Labor Government had made a terrific blunder in allowing themselves to be pushed into this prosecution.

MacDonald Sailed Into.

Lansbury, Maxton of the Clyde, Scurr, the pacifist editor of the "Socialist Review," Buchanan and Dickson of the Scottish labor members, Kenworthy of the Liberals, sailed into the House of Commons with questions which made it clear to the Government that they were in for a rough passage. Scurr asked:

"Why police officers were instructed to raid the offices of the Workers' Weekly, and to arrest the editor; what charges have been made against him; under which statute is he being prosecuted; whether any further arrests are pending and under whose instructions the present proceedings were instituted?"

He discovered that the Attorney General, Patrick Hastings, had employed the Director of Public Prosecutions for the job and that Campbell was being prosecuted under the "Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1795," one of the worst pieces of repressive legislation introduced by the famous William Pitt, who was scared by the French Revolution.

Kenworthy, the Liberal naval commander, immediately asked:

"Was this Act in force when certain officers in the Curragh were inciting to mutiny before the War?"

This was a delightful hit, recalling the occasion when the Tories, Lord Birkenhead, Sir Edward Carson, led the Ulster people against Irish Home Rule, armed the population and turned the army against the Parliament. The government of the day issued instructions to the army in Curragh Camp in Ulster and the officers refused to obey the orders of the government under the instruction of the two Tory leaders.

Maxton followed with questions and then Buchanan. Then Dickson rose and said: "I want to ask the Attorney General if any members of this house who will be speaking in their constituencies next week express similar opinions to that contained in the article in the Workers' Weekly does that men that we are subject to similar prosecution? (Hon. Members: "Yes"). If so, they will probably lose half their party."

Discussion Got Warm.

The speaker rose and put a stop to the discussion. It was getting too hot. But the row did not stop. The agitation went on behind the scenes. The government is in a devil of a fix. The Communists were winning hand over fist. Even the Parliamentary Labor Party was becoming infected. What with the Russians and the Treaty uproar and now their Communist colleagues getting all this publicity, and the masses of the workers feeling that in this appeal to the forces the Communists were right, the Labor Government is in a quandary and looking round for a way out. Instead of extending the prosecutions they are looking for every possible loophole thru which they can get to stop this prosecution.

They know that the Executive of the Communist Party will not give way. They know that we are preparing to subpoena leading members of the Government and the Labor Party into the witness box and they will have to face their own statements. They know that men like Lansbury, Wallhead, Purcell, all of them holding important positions in the Labor movement will voluntarily come into the witness box and line up side by side with Campbell in the plea of justification. They are feeling the pressure from below with a vengeance. They are preparing to capitulate and to withdraw the charge.

These events are big victories for the working class of Britain, evidence of the fact that the opposition has underestimated the strength of the class instincts deeply rooted in the British workers. The British Imperialists may make tools of the intellectuals, the leaders of the Labor Party, but the great proletarian mass in this country cannot be fooled for long. These two blunders of the Labor Government have done more to cleanse the labor movement of social pacifism and stimulate its class consciousness than any "victories" they have won since the Labor Party was an opposition party.