

The New Year of Crisis in British Capitalism.

By J. T. Murphy (London).

It is now more than seven months since the Labour Government set out to prove that it was a more decisive factor in the restoration of capitalism than its predecessor the Baldwin Government.

Now let the facts speak.

The latest figures on unemployment are as follows

January	5/30	1,508,000
December 16/29		1,303,600
December 16/28		1,271,100
December 16/27		1,100,000

These come within the scope of the Unemployment Insurance Act and are registered at the Labour Exchanges. It is difficult to tell how many unemployed are not registered but the following figures indicate the number receiving Poor Law Relief and not entitled to Insurance benefits. There are 1,030,000 in receipt of this relief. At the same time the workhouses are full of young men refused all forms of relief, Poor Law Out relief and state insurance.

That these conditions mean an offensive against wages and working conditions and an intensification of labour for the workers is already evident. Already in the period of the Labour Government the average wages have fallen by 5 per cent whilst the cost of living has risen by 7 per cent since June last.

The old year ended with the workers of the big industries restlessly striving, fighting back and yet faced with new attacks. Two thousand workers in the woollen mills of Yorkshire are on strike against wage reductions which are developing throughout all the mills. All the woollen workers are faced with the demand for 10 per cent wage cuts. It is the manoeuvring of the trades union bureaucracy and the Labour Government which is deferring the extension of the stoppage. They are moving with the employers in the direction of a further arbitration award on the lines of the Cotton Arbitration award which brought such good results for the cotton bosses last year.

This of course is part of the social fascist policy of the Labour Government and the Labour Party. Its other aspects are clear as daylight where the strikes are taking place. At Saddleworth for example where the strike is proceeding there is an open alliance of the Labour Government forces both local and national with the police in efforts to break the strike. There are as many police at the mill gates every morning as there are strikers. They do not hesitate to violently break up meetings, arrest communist leaders almost for looking at the strike. In court one trades union official testified to the fact that he went every morning to the mill to assist the police.

Whilst these developments open the new year in the woollen industry, the weavers of Lancashire in the cotton industry are balloting on the question of strike action for a 25 per cent increase of wages. The action of the weavers has followed promptly upon the Labour Government's arbitration award of 6.5 per cent wage reduction. The demands of the weavers have been made in the teeth of the opposition of the union officials. Twice the Executive Committee of the weavers organisations turned down the demands of their members. But they were forced to go forward, unwilling as they were, with the demands of the workers. The demands were rejected by the employers and now again in spite of the official sabotage the workers are voting on the question of strike action. Unemployment has reached great proportions and the discontent amongst the 600,000 cotton workers grows from day to day. They have been told repeatedly that wage cuts "would set the industry on its feet" only to find the old story repeated. Rationalisation of the cotton industry is proceeding rapidly, worsening conditions of labour, speeding it up enormously and spreading unemployment. Everything points to the cotton industry of Lancashire being a storm centre of the class war in 1930.

Although the railway companies hand in glove with the Railway Union prevented a stoppage on the question of the continuation of the 2.5 per cent wage cut the deepening of the discontent amongst the railway workers is proceeding apace. Rationalisation goes on in this industry probably more

rapidly than in any other. A report in the "Times and Engineering Supplement" December 28/29 of the results of the introduction of the 40-ton coal wagons by the London Midland and Scottish Railway tells its own story of what rationalisation means to the railway and transport workers every day. It says: "At Stoneybridge Park special arrangements have been made for receiving the coal from these wagons, and a train composed of ten of them carrying 400 tons of coal can be unloaded by five men in half-an-hour. To unload a similar coal consignment from the standard 12-ton wagon would take eight men 12 hours, as the work would have to be done by hand ... The arrangements are so complete that from the colliery to the bunkers above the furnaces no handling is required." The loco men, the shunters, the men who load and unload the wagons will no doubt "appreciate" the rationalisation policy of the Labour Government and the employers.

But if these industries already mentioned are deeply stirred what of the **coal industry**? Ever since 1921 the coalfields of Britain have been battlefields of fierce class struggle. Capitalist coal production is battered from all sides, from the advance of oil, electricity, increased world production, new means of power generation. The year 1929 recorded an increase of sixty strikes on the year 1928 and during this period there have existed "agreements". There have been not less than 140 strikes in the year. This is very vital evidence both of the will to struggle on the part of the miners and the fact that struggle does not depend upon the termination of agreements as some people think. Most of these struggles have been conducted in the face of the sabotage of the trades union officials.

The year has ended with coal as a central problem before the Government. Its **Coal Bill** breaks every pledge the Labour Party gave to the miners. It provides for the centralisation of the mineowners control. It prepares the way for the raising of prices of coal. It provides for the reduction of wages through arbitration machinery. At every point it has endeavoured to dodge the straight question concerning wages. Did it mean to reduce wages or not? It did not think it would be necessary. It deplored wage reductions. It proposed to give the marketing schemes a three months run to enable the employers to get into their stride so that wage reductions would be unnecessary. But at no point did it propose to stand against wage reductions. On the contrary on the basis of helping the coalowners to "avoid strikes" it proposed and put through its wages board scheme which is nothing less than a full scheme of arbitration to deal with the districts separately, to isolate them with the assistance of the Miners Federation and the County Miners Associations and secure wage reductions.

Already the "Colliery Guardian" says that the Coal Bill has played the useful role of "detracting the attention of the miners from the termination of the district agreements", all of which must now come under revision with the new Bill in operation. But the employers have not waited for the termination of the agreements or the Wages Boards. In every coalfield they are keeping up an incessant attack. With the new features of the situation it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that the miners are going to be in the forefront of great struggles. Already the **United Mine Workers of Scotland** are setting the pace with a repudiation of the Coal Bill and the agreements of the reformist leaders. They have set out their programme of demands upon which they are preparing for a great struggle. With them of course are all the militant forces of the other coalfields working on the same programme of action whilst taking a leading part in daily struggles which are arising in every coalfield under the pressure of the rationalisation drive of the coalowners.

Change of Address!

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