

# THE MINERS' STRUGGLE IN ENGLAND

## The Results of the British Miners' Fight.

By John Pepper.

The fight of the British miners is approaching its end, and one district after another is concluding separate agreements with the mineowners. The ranks of those who have not returned to work are becoming thinner and thinner. The guerrilla warfare is only being continued in a few districts, but even there the resistance of the workers is growing weaker from day to day.

For seven whole months has this struggle lasted, one of the greatest events in the whole international Labour movement of recent years. Now, that it has entered on its last phase, the time has come to draw up the balance of this heroic mass struggle and to draw the logical conclusions. How can we explain the enormous significance of the fight of the British miners? In the first place in that the background of this fight is the decline of the British Empire, a situation in which the British capitalists, in view of their desperate struggle for the world market, are no longer able to make great concessions to the working class, and in which any great fight of the workers to maintain their former standard of living must inevitably meet with resistance from the whole bourgeoisie and their Government and must necessarily develop into a political fight.

The character of the fight was determined above all by the circumstance that the British coal mining industry is now passing through a severe crisis which places the British bourgeoisie before the dilemma of getting rid either of its "superfluous coal" or of its "superfluous miners". All the characteristic features of the great fight are due to these chief factors. We can only completely understand the significance of this struggle if we take the following circumstances into consideration.

The struggle of the miners which lasted for seven months, was connected with the first general strike and was to some extent simultaneous with it. Clausewitz, the great theorist on military strategy once said that it is only possible to understand the significance of a war if we take into consideration that it is carried on in an atmosphere of danger. It is equally difficult to understand the struggle of the miners unless we take into consideration that during the whole seven months there was an atmosphere of emergency conditions, i. e. the open application of dictatorial power on the part of the capitalist Government.

From the very beginning the situation was characterised by an unusual intensification of the relations between the classes. Above all two hostile forces, the coal magnates and the miners, came into collision (according to the excellent expression of the "Economist" "an irresistible force came into contact with an immovable object"). Then, however, the fight of the miners started the general attack of the bourgeoisie on the whole trade union movement rolling.

Finally, one of the most important characteristic peculiarities in this fight was the circumstance that not such pronounced "Right" leaders as Hodges were at the head of the Miners' Federation, but Herbert Smith and Cook, who are known as "Left" leaders. Perhaps no fight has ever led to such important economic consequences as the present fight of the miners. In the course of the seven months' fight, not only the political but the whole economic life of the country depended on it. All the important branches of industry were paralysed as were also the whole exports and imports of Great Britain. For several months the whole world market was under the influence of the British miners' fight and the economic crisis in Great Britain as well as the improvement in the juncture of affairs in the countries of Central Europe were connected with the struggle. As regards the economic side, the strike proved a very strong weapon and now, when the struggle is nearing its end, we can state that the miners were compelled to capitulate not so much by the pressure of the dictatorial power of the Government, not so much because of the superiority of the forces of the coal magnates, not so much by hunger, as in the first place, chiefly, because of the treachery of the leaders of the British Labour movement and owing to the efforts of international Reformism.

The heroic fight of the British miners will always remain one of the most glorious chapters in the history of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat. The history of the fight of the miners is purely and simply the history of the treachery of the Reformist leaders. The analysis of this great struggle shows four different periods. In the first period the whole British working class fought with the miners and even compelled the official leaders of the trade union movement to place themselves at the head of the general strike. In the second period Miners' Union was left alone in the fight and the treachery of the official leaders of the trade union movement isolated the miners from the other workers. Nevertheless the Miners' Federation, although it was isolated, represented a tremendous fighting force which would have had every prospect of success, had there been a united leadership and had the struggle taken of course it ought to have taken. In the third period, the leaders of the Miners' Federation, having till then vacillated, showed a tendency to capitulate. They recommended accepting the proposals of the Bishops, they sabotaged the extension of the strike recommended by South Wales, they called upon the workers to accept the conditions of capitulation laid down by the Government. The fourth period of the struggle began at the moment when all the former leaders (with few exceptions) left the fighting masses of the miners to their fate. In the most critical period of the fight these old leaders failed, and destroyed the united front of the miners by assenting to district agreements before concluded.

Side by side with the general treachery of the old Reformist leaders, we see new leaders cropping up. These new leaders were provided by the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Minority Movement. Wherever the influence of the Communists and the Minority Movement made itself felt, the miners passed resolutions which testified to their determination to fight having remained unshaken.

The same picture was seen in an international measure. The Reformist trade union leaders and social democracy left the fighting miners to their fate in the most shameful way, and only the Comintern and the revolutionary trade unions fulfilled their international duty. The attitude of the trade unions of the Soviet Union which gave evidence of their solidarity, was a brilliant example for the whole international working class.

After seven months of fighting and starvation, the miners are returning into the dark depths of the shafts. This time the battle is lost; the working day is lengthened, wages are reduced and the miners have been forced to enter into long period agreements; the importance of a united trade union has been considerably reduced thanks to the conclusion of district agreements.

These are facts which no one can deny, and the Reformists are sure to use them in order to draw the conclusion that it would have been better not to fight at all. After every defeat of a revolutionary fight, the Reformists once more come to Plekhanov's conclusion that "it would have been better not to have taken up arms at all". The Reformists, however, are telling lies. The medal has its reverse side. The fight of the miners has not been useless. Not only the miners, but the whole British working class and the world proletariat will have much to learn from this fight. The British working class, which has for decades been deeply sunk in the slough of opportunism, has now learnt from the experiences of the general strike and the miners' fight how to fight against the bourgeoisie. The general strike, the seven months' struggle of the miners and the emergency conditions have greatly altered the British working class. It is passing through a deep-reaching process of revolutionisation, and many British workers have already found the path leading them towards the Communist Party.

The British and the international proletariat have learnt the following important truths from the experiences of the miners' fight:

1. The efforts of the bourgeoisie to stabilise capitalism will inevitably lead to great mass fights and hasten the overthrow of capitalism.

2. Every important event in the Labour movement of any country will now inevitably become an international event and must be regarded by the international proletariat as a common cause of the workers.

3. Every great economic fight of the workers with the background of disintegrating capitalism turns into a political fight. It must be carried on with the application of political means.

4. The workers cannot be victorious either in great economic fights or in great political fights as long as the Reformists are at their head. Only when they are led by new revolutionary leaders will they be able to carry on their struggle for their standard of living and for political freedom to a victorious end.