

THE GENERAL ELECTION AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

By HARRY POLLITT

THE election campaign opens in a period of sharpening class struggles. At the very moment when all three capitalist parties, Tory, Liberal and Labour, are speaking of Industrial Peace and Reconstruction, the workers in every industry are beginning to revolt. Slowly the effects of rationalisation, carried through as a result of the open collaboration of the reformist labour leadership with the capitalists, are making themselves felt upon the economic standards of the workers. They are reflecting themselves in ways that thousands of workers refused twelve months ago to believe would ever happen, and they are so terrible in their effects that the workers are resisting and fighting in face of their trade union leaders and in spite of the traditional belief in constitutional trade unionism that has been so assiduously cultivated in Britain.

These strikes and lock-outs just beginning are only the first signs of a great mass strike movement that will develop in this country over the heads of the reformists and under the leadership of the Communist Party and Minority Movement. Day by day the reformist leaders are giving exposures and betrayals that in their blatancy and grossness outdo all their previous betrayals.

There is now no attempt to camouflage their tactics. The mask is off. The new revolutionary period, born out of the inner contradictions of the new period of capitalism, forces them to take their stand unreservedly with the capitalists against the workers. So that official trade unionism has become a means whereby the capitalist can lower wages, intensify exploitation, abolish long-standing customs and practices in the workshops that have been won after fierce class struggles, adopt a merciless rate-cutting policy to all those who work systems of piece work,

force speeding-up to the utter disregard of human life and safety. These are the practical manifestations of Mondism, Rationalisation and modern Trade Union leadership.

This is the aftermath of the General Strike betrayal and Miners' Lock-Out, and it is an eloquent testimony to the demands that the reformist bureaucracy make upon all those who now seek to make an alliance with them, that A. J. Cook should now repudiate his pamphlet, "Nine Days," and in his speech at Tyldesley on April 14, 1929, declare :—

Let us not waste our time now in quarelling about what happened in 1926.—*Manchester Guardian*, 15.4.29.

and as the struggles of the workers develop both before and after the election, men like A. J. Cook will be compelled even in their own industries to assume exactly the same rôle as the MacDonalds, Bevins and Thomas's did in 1926.

What is happening at this moment? After the General Strike and Miners' Lock-Out, after two years of Industrial Peace treachery, the conditions in the workshops are getting past all human endurance. And the means of breaking this resistance is not the old style capitalist methods ; the breakers of the workers' resistance are the Trade Union and Labour Party leaders, the open agents of the capitalists now in control of the machinery and organisation of the movement.

The Cricklewood Busmen had a fight against speeding-up that is not merely a danger to their own lives but a danger to the public ; it is Mr. Bevin, of the Transport and General Workers' Union, who tries to smash that resistance by threats and suspensions from officials, etc.

The workers in the Austin Motor Works strike against wage reductions, unorganised workers lead the strike, the trade union leaders are called in to split the solidarity of the men and to use the strike as a means of recruiting to a trade unionism that is, in effect, in Austin's bound to be company unionism.

The Boilermakers again and again refuse to endorse a Shipyard Agreement that shackles the men to an elaborate conciliation machinery which would destroy any chance of the men's grievances being speedily tackled, their E.C. refuses to recognise the vote of the men,

The Woollen Textile workers take a ballot vote as to whether they are prepared to accept a wages reduction, there is a small majority in favour of strike action, but the Executives of the Unions refuse to call a strike and recommend the acceptance of the wage reduction "under protest." A decision upon which the *Manchester Guardian*, April 4, 1929, makes the following comment :—

The result of this appeal to the operatives is important, because it may well be taken by other employers in the West Riding as a signal for them to secure similar reductions to those gained so easily by the heavy woollen employers.

As I write this article, April 15, 1929, a lock-out has been in progress seven weeks at the Dawdon Colliery. Three thousand eight hundred men and boys are involved, resisting a wage reduction that is estimated to average 3s. per shift. The Durham Miners' Association have tried to get the men to accept, under protest. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain so far has not made a single pronouncement of support (perhaps Mr. Cook is too busy repudiating his past), and the local official leaders are defeatists who do not dare to organise national support for these men.

All the above are the living facts of the class struggle, and they are taking, or have taken, place in industries where the capitalists signed the Mond Letter of December, 1927, asking for collaboration with the T.U.C. General Council, and having got it, the workers are now experiencing the results and fighting against them.

It is pertinent in this connection to again note the type of speeches that were made last year by Trade Union Leaders and Capitalists alike :—

The members of the T.U.C. were now engaged in discussions with a representative group of employers on a wide range of problems. They were asked "How can you go into conference with people who tried to beat you in 1926, people who have fought you?"

His answer was that he regarded the change of attitude of these people as an indication that Labour had won the first round."—*Daily Herald*, April 30, 1928.

Let me point out what I think is the great change I have noticed throughout the whole of these conferences which we have been having for so many months, and it is that the leaders of Labour in this country have realised one basic fact. It is that unless industry

is prosperous there is nothing to be got for the workers.—LORD MELCHETT, *Morning Post*, December 12, 1928.

As a member of the employers' side of that body (Mond—T.U.C.) he would tell them that he was amazed at the change which had come about since the General Strike over those teaching Labour opinion.—WILLIAM HARRISON, Chairman, *Daily Chronicle* group of newspapers, January 31, 1929.

It is "the great change" that is responsible for driving the workers' conditions down, and it is one of the basic facts facing the workers in the General Election, for it is these same leaders, who betrayed the General Strike and who are carrying through rationalisation for the capitalists, who are now asking to be elected as a Labour Government. The thing is one that it is impossible for any class-conscious worker to do. Just as the Labour Leaders are the instruments to force through wage reductions to-day, to-morrow, as a Government, they will be the means of carrying through rationalisation on a tremendous scale and, as a result, hastening the coming of war, which the imperialists are making inevitable and which will come the sooner, the quicker rationalisation takes place.

Therefore the election period is for the revolutionary workers, though not a vote-catching period, yet a mobilising for heavy struggles. Advantage must be taken of an awakened interest in politics to bring out the whole implications of the present period and the present leadership. The new line of the Communist Party and Minority Movement will be accepted by all the best elements in the working class because it is the only policy that the workers can adopt.

The fight now in every sphere of political activity, whether in elections, strikes, lock-outs, unemployed demonstrations, etc., is against the enemies, the capitalist class and the Labour Party and the T.U.C. The apparent "stabilisation" of capitalism has been achieved at the sole expense of our class, the success won by technical development and all-round attacks on the workers have not solved the problems of capitalism, they have only led to a development of the contradictions of capitalism as they increasingly manifest themselves at home and abroad.

The problems confronting the workers can only be solved by smashing the capitalists, and their allies, and by the formation of

a revolutionary workers' government. This is the basic fact to place before the workers in the election period. Every fight, however small in character, carried out under the leadership of the Communist Party, is preparatory work for the final objective, the Revolutionary Workers' Government, and the more struggles that develop between now and polling day the more will be exposed all the treachery of the Labour Leaders, whose only rôle to-day is that of defending and reconstructing capitalism in the interest of the present ruling class.

And this policy was never made clearer than by Mr. J. R. MacDonald himself when, in a recent tour of his Seaham constituency, he spoke in every part of it—except Dawdon, where 3,800 men and boys had then been fighting a life-and-death struggle for bread for three weeks—and when at Murton, a twenty minutes' bus ride from Dawdon, he was asked "Why was not Mr. MacDonald giving a fighting lead to the miners at Dawdon Pit," he answered :—

He knew his job better than to interfere in what was Trade Union business. The Labour Party, unlike the Communists, was not out to exploit the industrial difficulties of the Unions.

Fighting for bread and helping to win that fight is the main task in the present period. The Communists will never desert that fight or the workers who are engaged in it. Let Mr. MacDonald go on looking after "his job." This election is a stage in this fight in which for the first time the workers will be able to support their own working-class Party—The Communist Party.