Pact Parties and Slavery.

Do the Trade Unions Agree?

This election has been fought, on the Rood at least, on the events of March, 1922, just as the Transvaal Provincial elections of 1914 were fought on the deportations, etc., and the recent Indian elections on the bantus. But the Pact voters have been declared by their votes that they will not tolerate the suppression of popular movements by Martial Law, bullets, bombs from the air, and shooting of prisoners. To this extent the Pact has succeeded, as the 1922 strike, though struck against capitalist tyranny. But mingled with this sound the Pact has also, like the 1922 strike, unmistakably expressed an unswerving racial hostility to, and desire to enslave, the non-European masses.

The report entitled "The Story of a Crime," already twice reviewed in the "International," is perhaps the most serious recent attempt to define this vague composite sentiment common to the rank and file of both Pact parties, a sentiment which could not but colour the legislation and administration of a Pact in office and might even precipitate great bloodshed.

This report deserves peculiar attention because it is published virtually in the name of ten of the principal Trade Unions of South Africa. These Unions no doubt endorse it in so far as it presents an indictment of the methods of capitalist imperialism, but that it puts completely in the shade, as election propaganda, the Chamber of Mines pamphlet published four days later—and is consequently completely ignored by the Chamber Press. But we venture to think that the Unions will dissociate themselves from some of the views it expresses on the "native question." "SLAVERY WITHIN LIMITS." At lucid intervals the report catches a partial vision of the truth. "The issue," it says (p. 38), "is not between white and black labour but between free labour and cheap slave labour"; and (p. 7): "All of us are agreed that the slave labour system, existing as it does only by virtue of special legislation, must be kept by legislation within the narrowest possible limits. Its existence is a constant menace to all free labour . . . ."

But, save for these stray admissions, it accepts the slave labour system as an axiom, only harking back to it as it was before 1922, or perhaps before the War, as if those periods presented the perfect equilibrium; and its main protest is against the system but only against its "extension" beyond that happy medium. "The system of conditions under which Jua Gwane are espoused by the coloured community" (are whites also compounded at relief works, by the way?) "is a grave menace not only to free labour of any kind and especially to free white labour but to the whole scheme of our economy." And (p. 7) "We are not even expressing any opinion about the compounded native labour system for nothing works when the real issue is before us, since WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO ENCROACH ON IT." In short, it is "a constant menace to all free labour," and yet "we have no desire to encroach on it." Do the ten Unions endorse that?

Mr. McFee, one of the authors, is known for his part to agree with the Chamber of Mines, and Crawford, that more black labour on the mines is desirable because it involves more white labour.

Incidentally, it is a poor justification for the system of "slave labour if kept within limits" that even on the capitalist side it has been acknowledged (p. 27) that "there may be a limit to the cheapening or enslavement of labour. That only comes to this, that such a system is approved also by capitalists in its own interests.

Inequality.

Again, the report says: "We have seen in the Cape the results of a policy of equality. There the European artisan has been almost entirely displaced by cheap native and coloured free labour." Leaving aside the question whether labour even at the Cape can truly be called "free" under capitalism, this displacement is obviously the result of the greater cheapness of the native and coloured labour. That is not "equality" but just the reverse, colour bar or colour line. But it is a serious error to ascribe absorption of a legislatively colour bar does not produce equality? Clearly it is not any supposed "equality" due to the absence of a colour bar, but on the contrary. The less the act of inequality still prevailing even at the Cape, that constitutes the real and "constant menace to all free labour." AND THE ONLY EFFECT OF A "CLEAR LINE OF DEMARCATION OF OUR BAR 1913 JUST TO STABILISE OR STEREOTYPE THIS INEQUALITY, leaving the menace arising from it intact.

"SKILLED" AND "UNSKILLED.

This hard and fast distinction between "skilled" and "unskilled" work, too, is not in accordance with fact. It betrays the same sort of bourgeois bookishness on working-class matters as the commonplace contrast between "workers by hand" and "workers by brain." All labour involves skill and brains, but the "every normal worker tends to become more and more skilled and to use his brains to better purpose, as the report itself admits when it says "it was only in the semi-skilled work that the European could earn enough to live whilst learning to become a skilled man on the mine." Taking the general body of South African labour as a whole the distinction of "skilled" and "unskilled" can hardly be said to be in vogue at all. It is chiefly maintained in the case of a comparatively few, and the object is to class as many workers as possible as "unskilled," so as to get them cheaper, although they are just as essential to production as the "skilled." Moreover, the barrier cannot be successfully maintained by the skilled, who are too few and too weak politically and indoctrinarily to resist when, as in January, 1922, it was clearly the policy of the Government to break it down, e.g., by classing any number of those previously called skilled as "semi-skilled, redundant and border-line occupation workers." This, coupled with the deplorable lack of one man, one vote for workers against another, is the weakness of a mere "white labour" or "white South Africa" policy. The Pact proposal to prevent natives from doing "skilled" work which also implies preventing whites in a class society. The object of the from doing "unskilled" work even if it could possibly be enforced on a national scale, is based on unreality.

"THE NIGGERS" AND RACIALISM.

In order to bolster up the shabby barricade purported to protect skilled white labour, the Pact in its Report, in spite of its own words, adopts the man-in-the-street's slogan of "keeping the nigger in his place" and generally hating and despising him. It repeatedly speaks of the whites as "the conquered and governing people" and the "native instinct against giving way to the negro"—not an "alien" tradition of "Jews in Europe," by the way, but deep-seated in most white South Africans. It obviously dips into the old "Nigger slaver" tradition, and leads in the style of South Asia, the Department of "Justice," of native attempts to industrial organisation and strikes. It emphasises native crimes against whites and glosses over the converse. It shows marked contempt for the native voters. It sneers at those who protest at police ill-treatment of natives or who call attention to anti-native prejudice in the national press of the Union. In its view the South African "aristocracy" is "bested" not because it is an aristocracy but because it has coloured rather than blue blood in its veins. Its real concern against "the niggers" is that white wage-earners have largely been "absorbed into the Negro races," which is inaccurate. It even says: "If mine native labour were free labour, the European population, especially the European women would have to be compounded in fortifications" (1), which besides being grotesque is just SO MUCH FASCIST WHITE LEAGUE TALK.

The report does not even notice the suggestion that the "racial conflicts" between "poor whites" and natives on March 7 and 8, 1922, were engineered by provocateurs: it seems to consider them quite natural on either side.

ALL THIS MISCHIEVOUS RACIALISM SIMPLYengeance TO AN APPROVAL OF THE "SLAVE SYSTEM," assigning to all whites the position of enslavers, and to the natives, especially the European women, that of "the required labour stock". To say the rule that the native is of course to be paid less than the white for the same work—and THAT IS JUST WHERE THE DEADLINE OF THE COMPETITION COMES IN—and leads to the elimination of the whites as workers.

Do the ten Unions endorse all this?

A "NO CLASS" REPORT.

In short the report is entirely vitiated by founding on a racial instead of a class view of the labour situation. That is the cardinal error behind the whole issue of the slave system, its objection to "equality," its rigid water tight segregation of "skilled" from "unskilled." The result is what might be called "Dr. MacFee's Pink Pamphlet for Pale Politics".

THE REAL ISSUE.

What is the true perspective?

A society based on black slave labour, even if it includes a small "protected" privileged" white section, is nevertheless still in essence a capitalist class society; and the evil to be combated is not merely a scarcity of coloured labour, or a privilege within it, but THAT SOCIETY ITSELF. To be "enemies of society"—that sort of society—is the role dictated to the workers by the class struggle involved.

(Concluded on page 7.)
An Overworked Capitalist

One Holiday in Ten Years.

Sir Lionel Phillips, in resigning the chairmanship of the Central Mining and Finance Corporation, explained that he had held that office for ten years, and had only had one month’s holiday when ill-health made it imperative.

The “Star,” with discounting hypocrisy, then compared this life of labour with the luxurious lives of the Rand mine workers, who have, among other privileges, a whole two weeks’ holiday a year, and the underground men 58 days after three years’ service. It is difficult to write dispassionately of such a monstrous insult to the workers.

Phillips, who is said to have graduated in “shirt sleeves under a baking sun,” is in his 70th year. How many workers, particularly underground men, reach this age or even half this, the allotted span of man? Phillips has not got mine profits, and has lived on the fat of the land for the greater part of his life, at the expense of the toilers.

To insinuate that Sir Pi has been working for ten years in the veriest moonshine.

How many sea trips, surrounded with every comfort and luxury, has he taken to South Africa, to say nothing of Egypt and other places, in that time, whilst the workers who piled up his fortune were eating dust and dirt, or nothing, whilst they sweated and toiled for a mere pittance.

What this devoted worshipper of the golden calf calls work would be a gorgeous holiday for his places, black and white.

He has eaten and drunk the best, has been able to gratify his lightest whim, has been fawned on and flattered by the sycophants and lickspittals who surround such money-bugs, and we are asked, forsooth, to pity him because he has had only one holiday in ten years.

His life has been one long holiday, varied occasionally by a visit to the mines to give orders that the chains of the Rand workers were to be made heavier and the yoke more galling, and if necessary they were to be shot back to work if they refused to do what the law forbade, but which they understood.

No more callapsa slave-driver exists than this man, who was one of the schemes who brought on the Beer War, who as a reward for services rendered him and his gang gave the Rand workers the sack and imported 50,000 Chinese to take their place.

The same incursion of greed and ruthless exploitation was responsible for the massacre of 1913, the deportations of 1914. He is who on visiting Cape Town on one of his sea voyages, which are not holidays, left his order that several thousand white miners should be sacked and their places taken by natives.

To him, therefore, belongs the responsibility for 1912; for Smuts was no more than his tool.

This insignificant but malignant specimen of humanity has brought more misery to South Africa than any man. So the “Star” has the effrontery to use his noble sacrifice in the interest of profits and dividends for himself and his disolute friends and the text on which he preaches to the Rand workers of the unequalled privileges they enjoy by being allowed to shorten their lives to an average of about seven years in order that they may enjoy “cheap houses, inferior food, shabby clothing, education and amusement for the few years that capitalism allows them to live.

CIVILISED LIVELIHOOD.

A Foggy Phrase.

Colonel Creswell is fond of the word “civilized.”

In his “message” to the electors of South Africa he uses the phrase “a civilized livelihood.”

What does he mean?

Does he mean a livelihood earned in a civilized country, or the livelihood of a civilized man? What good does it do the War at any rate, with being the most civilized country in Europe.

What kind of a livelihood do most of the people get there? But perhaps we will be told that the Hun was never really civilized.

Let us take Great Britain. The livelihood of the citizens ranges in that bleak side from nothing to 99 per cent per day.

Which is the civilized livelihood?

Perhaps he will have a livelihood on which a man can live a civilized life.

Well, some men could live a rational and cultured life—if that is what civilized means—on a hundred pounds, whereas another would need to live like a hog.

Like all Creswell’s phrases they are mere, phrases, and mean nothing.

There is no really civilized country, there is no civilized wage or livelihood.

Pact Parties and Slavery.

(Concluded from page 6)

Labour movement is to stimulate them to put in at least much ‘courage, tenacity and cohesion to vindicate their rights’ not “as the middle classes have done in the past” (p. 10) but as the capitalist class has done and is doing in its class interests.

To speak of the 1922 cells as “training” for their race” (p. 25) is as much beside the point as for instance to say the Dutch Bantu was driven into a new life. The poverty of the land, instead of saying “by the monopoly of the land in the hands of the few.” To prevent “the fight against displacement of the European by the Negro as a totally different thing from the fight against reduction of wages, to which "not much importance was attached," is to ignore that the two things were in fundamentals one.

If the issue were essentially racial, no solution could ever be hoped for; an endless and hopeless struggle between races which could never exterminate each other would be the only prospect. Once only does the working classes stand to lose in this matter (p. 26).

“Is there is all over the world a specific economic conflict between the employing classes and the wage-earning classes.”

IT IS ONLY BECAUSE THIS ISSUE IS A CLASS ISSUE, AND BECAUSE, AS HISTORY HAS PROVED, ONE CLASS CAN OVERTHROW ANOTHER AND EVERYTHING POINTS TO THE WORKING CLASSES BEING ABLE TO OVERTHROW THE CAPITALIST CLASS, THAT THE RACIAL ISSUE IS OVERHEARD ON AND IS WORTH CARRYING ON.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE AS TOUCHSTONE.

The class-struggle—that was the only issue in the strike and has been the only sound issue in this election. Into that struggle every section—of the non-European section—of the working class is and must be drawn if it is to succeed against so powerfully equipped an enemy.

The report dismisses the words of self-renunciation, heroic self-sacrifice, or even solidarity: but experiences has repeatedly shown the contrary, even while we have left him in the cleft of his own class position. And the more trained, intelligent, class-conscious, industrially organised and politically enthralled he is allowed and encouraged by white workers to become, the better fighter he will make.

Nor can we in these days swallow that old-fashioned notion of a limited available “wages fund” for which European and Negro must struggle against each other. Lower the European wage and status has not in fact added one penny or one cuit to the native wage or status. Equally raising the native will not lower the European.

The issue is clear: Either the European and to the level of the native or the native rises to the level of the European. The present system of South Africa, in fact the whole world, outside Russia, is bringing about the fore-mentioned, the class struggle in S. Africa, in fact all over the world, a state. Disparate the latter, Privilege-cum-slave system for “freedom” for me at the cost of slavery for the other fellow which the European is fighting against for 1922, and the fight failed.

The other system means THE ABOLITION OF ALL SLAVE LABOUR.

Which is the choice of the ten Unions.

S.P.B.