The Anti-Imperialist Struggle in South Africa and the I. C. U.

By H. Rathbone

In spite of the reactionary policy of Kadale, the leader of the South African native workers union the I. C. U. (Industrial and Commercial Union), in expelling all members from the I. C. U. who are Communists and in spite of his policy of identifying himself completely with the reformist leaders both in England and in Europe generally while on his recent visit from South Africa, events in South Africa are forcing the I. C. U. into a position in which, if its leadership does not come out clearly on the side of the anti-imperialist struggle with all the implications that that step would involve, its influence amongst the native workers will rapidly decline.

A temporary compromise on the struggle between the British and the Dutch capitalists as to which should be the predominant exploiters of the South African native peoples, expressed as it was in the Flag controversy, has now been reached. This leaves the way clear for an agreement to be come between the two white capitalist groups to intensify this exploitation of the native peoples. This will be done by the four Anti-Native Bills which will shortly come up before the South African Parliament. These Bills will, on the one hand, intensify the exploitation of the native peasant and, on the other hand, are designed to force him from off his land in order to make him seek employment from the capitalist industries and mines in the towns.

Therefore the I. C. U. in the first place, owing to its recent efforts to get membership in the agricultural areas will be forced into taking a very militant attitude against these Bills if it is to retain any of the membership it may have gained in these areas.

Secondly the leaders of the white labour movement have still more clearly shown their essential antagonism towards the native movement in full agreement with the imperialists. The South African Labour Party at its last Annual Congress in the first days of January had before it a proposal to alter its constitution in order to show off the "day still further when it expected to be able to introduce Socialism. An immediate advance to Socialism, so the report to the conference ran, is "in no country more incongruous than in South Africa... gar- risonised by a handful of white people, living a civilised life superimposed upon a proletariat of black men gradually evolving into a barbabarian" (Cape Argus, 3, 28.) Accordingly this to agree to any regard must be taken, so continued the report, "of the differences in the fundamental conditions imposed by the presence of an overwhelming native population still for the most part in the most primitive stage of development, side by side with a small European population whose standards of life must be maintained and improved". (Our emphasis.)

So only the white workers standards must be "maintained and improved". The natives - well they are still hardly beyond the stage of "barbarism". Further, the advocacy of Socialism raises inconvenient questions as to how Socialism for the white workers only would benefit the native population; for naturally Socialism is impossible for the latter because they are still "in the most primitive stage of development".

So the Labour Party cynically abandons the last pretence of serving the natives' cause and thus openly agrees to share with the exploiters in the most fearful and drastically exploitation of the native peoples.

Though these proposed alterations from which we have quoted were not apparently discussed at the Conference, yet it is clear from other facts that these alterations really express the policy of the Labour Party. For not only is the Labour Party in favour of the Anti-Native Bills now pending perhaps in Parliament, but they have even proclaimed their intention of moving an amendment to a Women's Enfranchisement Bill now before the South African Parliament, in order to restrict the franchise to women under this Bill would have meant the enfranchisement of many of the native women in this province.

The so-called "Left Wing" of this Labour Party is no better. For one of their E. C. members, Krentidge, prominent in this so-called "Left Wing", in an interview with the Cape Argus (27th January) said it the I. C. U. Government should concern itself "with an agreed programme for raising the standard of life in this country and creating conditions which will assist the white people and make this a white man's country in fact and not merely in name". Not a word about "assisting" the native peoples or about assisting them to raise their standard of life through a thorough anti-imperialist ideology of keeping the native exploited by the capitalists.

Now the British Labour Party through one of its so-called Left Wingers, Beckett after his visit to South Africa, has approved of the attitude of the South African Labour Party. Can then the I. C. U. expect anything from the British Labour Party?

Thirdly the South African white Traders Union Congress have rejected the application of the I. C. U. for affiliation. In rejecting this application they, like the same stand point as the Labour Party. For to the original application of the I. C. U. for affiliation the reply was made by the T. U. C. that the 100,000 native members of the I. C. U. would swamp the 50,000 white membership at present affiliated to the T. U. C. The I. C. U. in spite of this setback in the face turned the other side of the application to the South African Federation failing to any arrangement to preclude such an eventuality. (For the sake of unity this was of course the only tactic to adopt.) Yet in spite of this they got their second setback by the final rejection of their application. It was pointed out that this rejection was not based really on the white T. U. C.'s fear that they would be submerged by the "Afrikaner" economy. Factly. They were afraid for their own wages and no thought of assisting the native workers to raise theirs.

The I. C. U. in view of this situation issued a manifesto. In this manifesto it first rejects the counter-proposal of the T. U. C. for "periodical meetings" as "patronising". Though such a rejection is but natural, it is of course incorrect. For by such meetings the native workers would have had an excellent opportunity of still further exposing the anti-native policy of the white trade union leaders not only to the native workers but also to the white workers. The manifesto then, however, goes on correctly to point out that "We are the real working class in South Africa, the most oppressed section of the working population, and as trade unionists we have the right to dominate all trade union councils in which we happen to be in the majority". (It should be stated that the adjective "real" in the above quotation is only correct if by "real" is meant the most oppressed and exploited.)

But this process of forcing the I. C. U. onto the revolutionary path in spite of the clear democratic character that it has already received new impetus. For the newly formed "self-governing" state of Southern Rhodesia has recently issued a ban against the I. C. U. from organising branches in its state and has summarily deported the I. C. U. organiser from Southern Rhodesia. This has forced Kadale to come out with a full statement that the Government in that part of the country of which we shall find means as we have done in the past to get our message to our fellow workers, and we shall find men and women in your colony to raise and uphold the banner of freedom from all forces of oppression". With regard to the deportation he says "it is consistent with the best traditions of the South African Federation...it means our free speech is as non-existent in Southern Rhodesia as it is in other parts of the British Empire". (Times, 2, 1. 28.)

While we join in protest against this deportation and call upon all workers to do the same, we would like to point out to Kadale that such fine sentiments about the non-existence of free speech etc, would come better from one who had not suppressed free speech in his own organisation, the I. C. U. by the British Press Communists International.

Further, we could ask Kadale whether all these events do not show that the Communist Party of South Africa, which has consistently fought for the rights of the natives and is proved by the events we have described to be the only body containing European elements to have undertaken this struggle, is correct when it stated that the I. C. U. and the native workers could find no hope in the British Labour Party of our Amsterdam International. We have heard no protest from either of these two bodies on these events. The Daily Herald has not
Spanish Workers in the Fight against the Wages Tax.

By Yercovi (Barcelona).

As was expected, the fascist government of Primo de Rivera has intensified its anti-working class policy. Since its attempt in Summer of last year forcibly to introduce the nine-hour day in the textile factories of Barcelona, an attempt which, thanks to the determined attitude of the workers, was frustrated — it has endeavoured more and more to worsen the standard of living and working conditions of the working class. As a matter of fact it has succeeded, with the help of the reformists and in spite of the courageous defensive fight put up by the miners, in introducing the nine-hour day in the mines of Asturia.

This lengthening of the working day in the mines of Asturia has naturally led to an increase in the number of unemployed in this area. As a result the discontent of the workers found more and more clear expression, and the government of Primo de Rivera resorted to a very simple means in order to stifle the unrest — it arrested the champions of the unemployed. No less than 200 active workers, among them being 20 women, were thrown into prison.

The government however will not content itself with prolonging the working day. In order to make up the budget it has now introduced a decree according to which a further direct tax will be placed upon the workers: the wages tax. Wages amounting to 2250 Pesetas and over will be subject to a deduction of 3.5 per cent. Practically all the workers are affected by this tax.

This tax was to have come into force on the 1st of January last. But the Spanish working class, in spite of the state of emergency under which they live and in spite of the treachery of the reformist leaders, would not and will not tolerate such a tax, which is to be deducted from the already terribly low wages.

The first measure of resistance was adopted by the printers in Madrid. In the ‘Prensa Grafica’ printing works, where there is a Comintern nucleus, the workers stopped working after the wages tax. This strike was concluded after two days by the employers’ themselves undertaking to pay the tax which was to be imposed on the workers.

A few days later a strike broke out in the printing office of the daily newspapers ‘El Sol’ and ‘La Voz’ and also in the big publishing house ‘Calpe’ which belongs to the same firm. The reformist leaders of the printers’ trade union, much against their will, had to intervene in this strike. Of course they shrank back from the consequences of this conflict and concluded a shameful compromise; they agreed that Comrade Isidoro Acevedo, one of the two strikers, and an old Communist champion, should be dismissed.

Numerous workers’ delegations from Barcelona, Valladolid and other towns interviewed the Prime Minister and demanded an alteration of the law regarding the wages tax. Primo de Rivera replied to them in a provocative manner, declaring that they must first pay and keep their mouths shut, for the principle of authority must not be challenged; the government would see later on whether they would modify the tax.

The revolutionary trade unions of Barcelona have replied to this contempt with a heroic appeal to the workers not to pay the tax, and if necessary to go on strike. This appeal met with a response among the workers of Barcelona.

In the metal industry of Barcelona the workers have downed tools. The strike is general. The government is attempting to crush it with every means. More than one hundred arrests have already been carried out. The press with the aid of the censor, has been rendered completely silent in order to bolster the belief in Spain and abroad that everything is in the best order. The governor of Barcelona has even resorted to releasing all prisoners sentenced on account of petty larceny in order that they may be employed as strike-breakers.

Nevertheless the government has not yet succeeded in breaking the discontent of the working class against the dictatorship is constantly growing. Primo de Rivera’s regime is approaching evil days.

ECONOMICS

The Economic Situation in Italy.

By Edmondo Peluso.

Once more the Fascist Government of Italy is being helped out of a critical situation by the financial capital of the United States. On the basis of an agreement concluded last autumn with the Morgan and Auchincloss banks, the government availed itself of a credit of 125 million dollars; of this total, 75 millions were guaranteed with a gold cover by the central banks of the United States and 50 millions by the Morgan Bank, representing banks of the United States and Great Britain.

Upon receiving this credit, the Fascist Government proceeded, on December 22nd, 1927, to publish a decree in regard to the stabilisation of the lira. The new gold parity was established at 7919 gramma of fine gold per 100 Italian lire, corresponding to 19 lire to the dollar or 92.46 lire to the pound sterling. By means of this manipulation of bookkeeping, debts of the Italian Government to the Bank of Italy to the value of 4300 million lire were simply annulled.

Yet the Fascist Government failed to achieve a complete victory in its fight for the lira. The financial programme of the Government provides for a complete restoration of the lira rate in the course of a few years. But long before the lapse of this time, the Fascists had to take recourse to measures to prevent a further fall of the lira and thus to obviate an economic catastrophe which threatened to destroy the entire Fascist regime.

The legal rate thus established by decree at a level of 92.46 is already in excess of the “90 rate” which the Fascist Government had vociferously proclaimed to be the highest that could possibly be permitted. The rate of 92.46 is a concession to the Italian industry and was established with a view to enabling industry to reconquer those markets which it had lost by reason of the temporary stabilisation of the lira.

It will not be out of place here to call to mind that the economic consequences of the deflation programme published by Mussolini in his speech at Pesaro have been unpleasant both