

THE GENERAL STRIKE

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THE GENERAL STRIKE

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MANIFESTO ON THE GENERAL STRIKE.

Those who have followed the labour movement in other countries have heard more and more during recent years of the "General Strike." We heard of it in Spain, at Barcelona; then in France, Rome, and Holland, and more recently still at Odessa in Russia.

At a recent labour congress the English delegates were the only ones to vote against the General Strike. They seemed to understand little or nothing of what it meant—its means and its end. The labour movement of the world has advanced a further step, and England lags behind.

Yesterday the purpose of trade unions was to secure a trifling rise of wages, better conditions of labour, shorter hours, etc., and to act as a mutual benefit society.

To-day the trade unions represent the organisation of opposition against the growing greed and insolence of capitalist exploitation.

On the one side are those who possess the means of production: capital, factories, machines, land, etc., who compel us to work for them that they may pile up profits, and who have at their disposal all the forces of coercion that the capitalist society provides. On the other side are those who possess only their own labour-power, who are obliged to sell their strength and intelligence for a wage which will only provide for their immediate needs; but who can, if they will, oppose to the coercion at the service of their antagonists the invincible force of numbers.

Between these two groups, which form the greater part of what is called "Society," there is a continual struggle, the interests of the one being in constant conflict with the interests of the other.

It is not a question of obtaining some slight amelioration of the workers' lot, it is not a question of palliatives, but of destroying the whole system of caste and privilege, of abolishing the capitalist society, based on slavery, and substituting a free and harmonious society based on equality, mutual co-operation, and comradeship.

Of all the means at the disposal of the working class to realise its complete emancipation, the General Strike is the surest and most practical.

The General Strike consists in suspending production in all branches of industry, and if as a result of this the community should insist that the workers should organise production in the interest of all, the land, the mines, and the factories would return again to the people and be truly Socialised.

It is from the people alone, from their education, from their intellectual development that we can hope for any social amelioration.

Under the present conditions any spontaneous movement towards a better form of society comes almost wholly from the working classes. The oppression to which they have been subjected, so far from checking in them their aspirations, has fostered them, and along with them a spirit of independence.

In all times, resistance to oppression has shown itself by revolt,

more or less completely repressed by the class in power. Under the capitalist régime the revolt has taken the form of complete cessation of work, agreed to and carried out by a number of wage-earners.

There results then a new tactic of resistance, "The Strike," which characterises the permanent conflict between capital and labour. But the strikes which have taken place up to to-day have generally been limited to isolated industries. Strikes of this kind cause inconvenience to the masters, but, in the end, are almost without effect.

Often they are even useful to certain exploiters if they have stocks of goods which they wish to get rid of. In this case, which often happens, the master can easily make his serfs give in, since he can wait any length of time without loss. Capitalists are by this means often able to exhaust the funds of a trade union of which they are afraid.

And even if, as the result of a partial strike, the worker obtains a slight increase of wage, this victory is often quite valueless to him, for the free play of competition speedily re-establishes an equilibrium on the old level.

Partial strikes sometimes have other motives than raising wages; such are those instigated by the dismissal of a comrade from a workshop, leading all the workers into strike by the same movement of solidarity; or those again which break out as the result of measures directed against the small liberty of the workers.

But, as one can easily find out, the result of all these isolated movements is very small; for each concerns only a very small fraction of the proletarian class.

Above all, we have learned recently (from the Taff Vale case and others) that our rulers will force us to pay much more than is gained by the strike in "compensation" to the capitalists.

Does this mean that we condemn partial strikes on these grounds, and oppose them?

Far from it. We recognise their small value; but we know that to oppose them means taking the part of our adversaries.

But, we repeat, these partial movements have only a nominal influence in the social question. With this means it is necessary to be continually beginning over again, without for all that finding the possibility of a definite enfranchisement any nearer.

There is nothing for it but the widening of the strike movement.

There are those who tell the workers that they must seek their enfranchisement through politics. These men are either knaves or fools.

Fools if they think the liberation of mankind can be performed by legislation.

Knave if, knowing this to be absurd, they yet say it is possible, for purposes of their own.

While Parliament is composed of capitalists it is absurd to suppose that the liberation of the workers will be accomplished by parliamentary means.

We saw what interests control our legislation when the Automatic Couplings Bill was rejected by the railway shareholders who constitute Parliament, who would sooner endanger the lives of workers than lose one-eighth per cent. interest for a year.

And if they will act thus in small matters, how bitter will be their opposition when it is a question of changing the whole social organisation and abolishing the class distinctions which are their chief pride and care.

On the other hand, if the workers are to wait until they obtain a majority in Parliament, they will have to wait many centuries; for those who hold political power will not lose it without a determined struggle.

Parliamentary methods have been tried in France, in Belgium, in Germany, and have failed. Study the political movement in these countries, and you will at once see this.

The Belgians, the French, the Germans are seeing it. That is why they are turning to the General Strike. Learn to understand their action and you will not waste your time on politics.

Parliamentary reform can never bring the changes needed to make life free and joyous, as we desire it. It is useless to look for help from our rulers, and it is equally useless to hope to seize their power ourselves by political means.

Why all this round about way when the means to secure what we wish lies at our hand?

While the worker is still oppressed, while his meagre wages are still precarious, how can we wait for vain and empty palliatives, reforms, or what pretend to be such, whose aim is often rather to assure and pro-

long the capitalist society than to give a real amelioration of the lot of the worker?

For peace to reign among us, every human being must have the right to live and to be free. In place of the muttered curses and anger that rise from the depths of the social strata, it is necessary, by the establishment of Libertarian Communism, to bring peace and happiness into the midst of our oppressed civilisation.

But, before we shall be able to realise this desire of justice, we must pull down the old world of iniquity and lies, and of this the General Strike is the only means.

After what we have said, it will be easy to define the end we pursue.

The intolerable antagonism of labour and capital, to which the evils of society are due, can only be ended by the complete abolition of capitalist domination, by the suppression of the abuses of private property, and by the Communist appropriation of the means of production.

The sole end of the General Strike, and the only solution of the class war, is capitalist expropriation. To the worker his machine, to the peasant his land!

The day when the workers, with common accord, suspend production, and thus arrest the economic life, they will easily discover the extent of their own power; and then, instead of being contented with palliatives, the proletariat will once for all make their freedom and their right to subsistence secure.

In place of the system it destroys, we must build up a new society of autonomous communes, free and federated among themselves, forming in their totality a true federation and a just and equitable society.

ENGLISH WORKERS, ATTENTION!

"Nearly one-third of our population are compelled to toe the line that separates chronic starvation from sufficient nourishment, and it is therefore impossible for them to meet the demands made on brain and body by the complicated system of alternate work and play now forced on the rising generation by the demands of codes and educational departments. One of the results of this condition of things is that 30 per cent. of the youths who desire to enter the army have to be rejected for physical reasons, while the young soldiers who get accepted are simply swept out of existence by cholera and enteric whenever they have to take the field."

Ruskin, in his "Sesame and Lilies," prints in red ink an account taken from a daily paper of a case of starvation at the East End—that of a woman dying from sheer hunger. The man gained a pittance by buying old shoes, repairing and re-selling them. Through lack of even this wretched employment, and their unwillingness to apply to the workhouse for aid (which possibly might have been refused), the woman died from exhaustion.

We want another Ruskin who would print the facts given above by Dr. Farquharson in large block-type posters, and by means of sandwichmen or what-not place those facts under the eyes of almost every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom who could read.

Every worker who can think of anything beyond a pot of "half-and-half" and a screw of shag must, however dimly, sometimes compare facts such as the above with the talk he so constantly hears that this is the greatest, richest and most splendid empire the world has ever known; that English prestige is everywhere; that the English tongue is destined to be the language of mankind.

If such questions are broached in the ordinary workshop, the bulk of those present are inclined to believe this to be inevitable—that it has always existed.

And this is so, but only so long as the great bulk of the workers remain as they are. The ordinary worker does little more than vegetate. If they read at all it is the trash that abounds everywhere, whilst they are densely ignorant of even the main facts in the history of their own country. They may have heard of Queen Elizabeth, of King Alfred, but of the great social changes and epochs they know absolutely nothing. These are the men who have been oppressed and downtrodden in all times. They are the raw material for tyrants and rogues to manipulate.

But there are signs of an awakening, and one of these signs is the growth of internationalism, when the people will commune with each other, ignoring the dynastic, aristocratic and military clique who now assume the name of the nation.

W. M. S.

THE NATION.

"The meaning and purpose of life is not enjoyment but service. Even if Chamberlain called upon the workers to give more work for less enjoyment in the national cause we believe that the workers would respond to his appeal, provided they were convinced that the national cause would be served thereby."—*Daily Mail*.

This was one of the chief organs in demoralising the British workmen four years ago by its libels and slanders on the people of the two South African Republics; demoralised to such an extent as to sacrifice not only enjoyment but their very lives in depriving other people of enjoyment and their lives also; people whom they had never seen, and with whom they could possibly have had no quarrel but for the lying national press, of which the *Daily Mail* was one of the chief.

What is the result? A fair and prosperous land turned into a howling wilderness, a people deprived of their independence, prosperity replaced by abject poverty and misery.

That is the result in South Africa. At home, stagnation in trade, workmen turned adrift, workhouses being filled and taxation increasing.

What are the gains? Lord Milner and a few government officials receive enormous salaries for carrying on the work of oppression of the few who are left in the two Republics, and a few ninnies, promoted to fat jobs in this country, and Chamberlain howling for still more taxation. And these people, according to the tone of the *Daily Mail*, are the nation; and workmen are asked to give more work and take less enjoyment for their benefit, as though the workmen were only intended to minister to the wants of those who rule.

There are a few workmen who differ from that conception of a nation, who believe that they themselves are a part at least of it. The individual, the family, the tribe or village, the town, the county and an aggregation of these form the nation. The individual fights as best he can to win subsistence for himself from a stern and grudging Nature, not because he loves work, but because he desires the result of that work in order to supply his needs, and his physical needs are many in the varying moods of Nature but the end and aim of all his struggles is enjoyment, which will be but very scanty by his single efforts.

The family, by the division of labour, will be enabled to produce more, thereby creating more leisure—or more comforts—and the possibility of greater enjoyment.

The tribe or village is a still further improvement, and that which would have been impossible to the individual or family becomes an easy matter, and luxuries are produced, and still more leisure obtained for the enjoyment of those good things. With the further development of society so much more can be produced than is needed to supply physical wants that a considerable amount of time can be devoted to mental improvement. In an evil hour some one more cunning than his fellows conceived the idea of accumulating property and calling it private, and this gave rise to the complex state of society which we know to-day. The cunning minority has succeeded in deluding the majority into the belief that it must be guided as it is unable to guide itself, and the majority have tamely submitted, to have all the means of life taken from them, and allowed themselves to become debased and enslaved by the selfish cunning, backed by force, of the minority. The governors have their police—recruited from the ranks of the oppressed majority—for the purpose of safeguarding property because, they say, man is depraved and consequently dishonest.

Horace Greely, in his essay on "Reforms and Reformers," says to the rulers, "You say that man cannot walk erect; remove your bandages from his feet, your shackles from his limbs, and let us see! You say he cannot take care of himself; then why compel him in addition to take such generous care of you? You say he is naturally dishonest and thievish; but how could he be otherwise when he cannot fail to perceive that you, who set yourselves up for his guides and exemplars, are perpetually and enormously robbing him? Begin by giving back to him the earth which you have taken from under his feet, the knowledge you have monopolised, the privileges you have engrossed, and we can better determine whether he needs anything, and what, from your charity, after he shall have recovered what is rightfully his own."

"The meaning of life is not enjoyment but service," according to the *Daily Mail*. As we have served long enough without enjoyment, we mean to try to get our rulers to do a little of the serving in the future and we will take a share in the enjoyment.

S. M.

BRITISH LABOUR NOTES.

The most important event of the past month in the world of Labour in these isles is the victory of the Denaby and Cadeby Main Collieries over the Yorkshire Miners' Association. They claimed £150,000 for damages sustained during a strike which took place in June, 1902.

The case was tried in the King's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice, and, as was to be expected, the jury found for the company on all points. The damages are not yet assessed, but they are not expected to be less than £50,000.

Once more the societies were defended—save the mark—by Rufus Isaacs, K.C., assisted by four other K.C.'s, and once more, as with the Railway Servants, he distinguished himself by his cowardly defence. He admitted that damage was done, and his argument seemed to be simply to reduce the amount.

We wonder how much longer the trade unions intend to "take it lying down" and be plucked of their hard-earned shillings by capitalists and Liberal Jingo lawyers. Oh for a little less labour representation and a little more revolutionary spirit among the miners! As long as they attempt to fight the enemy with the very instruments that enslave them, *i.e.*, law courts, parliaments, and so on, just so long will they be beaten. The result will be as usual, and no doubt Messrs. Woods, "Mabon" and others will tell these poor miners that the remedy lies in sending men like themselves to the House of Commons, and the poor fools will believe them. The remedy lies in the General Strike, and until they realise this fact there is not much hope for them.

The *Weekly Tribune* made its first appearance on Feb. 6th, and as a weekly paper with leanings towards Labour it is a fair production. As a Labour paper claiming to voice the opinions of the two million organised workers of these isles it is a decided failure. With Richard Bell, M.P., as one of the editors, it was not to be expected that the paper would be very radical; but even a Labour M.P., should have sense enough to refrain from printing congratulatory letters from such ardent Jingo capitalists as the Earl of Crewe and Mr. R. B. Haldane. Then again they have Yves Guyot as a contributor on the subject of Protection and Wages in France. Fancy Guyot a friend of Labour! We hope our Comrade Puget will call the attention of the trade unions of France to this fact, so that they may acquaint some of the trade unions here with the career of this "eminent French economist and ex-Minister." The statement of policy is one of the weakest we have seen for some time, and for all practical purposes it might be the organ of Lord Rosebery or Mr. Haldane. We turn with relief from the platitudes of Free Trade in the leader, the humiliating spectacle of Labour deputations waiting on Ministers begging for crumbs from the rich man's table, Parliamentary news, and so on, to the very powerful serial story by the English Maxim Gorky, Mr. Bart Kennedy. The story is called "Lives of Iron," and is founded on Lancashire life in the cotton districts.

Mr. Kennedy was a half-timer in a great Manchester factory himself, so he knows whereof he speaks. The editor must have taken the story on trust, for it is hardly in keeping with the Labour Representation policy. The following speaks for itself:—

"Lancashire thralls. They wear not iron collars with their master's name inscribed thereon, as did their slave ancestors. But they wear clogs. Their masters may not strike them down, nor flog them, nor put them to the sword. But they may starve them to death; they may humiliate and degrade them; they may force them to live in filth and foulness. Ancient collars. Modern clogs. Signs with the same meaning.

"But a voice says, 'These men of Manchester are freemen.' A voice cries out, 'These men of Manchester have a vote!' True, they have a vote. True, they have the glorious privilege of saying which vampire shall next suck their blood.

"It were better for the men of Manchester to have the name as well as the game of slavery. It were better that they were not mocked by a shadow—that they were not given a stone in place of bread.

"Then their eyes might be opened."

Well done, Bart!

The death of Ben Pickard leaves the Yorkshire Miners' Association without a president, and, without any reflection on that gentleman, we trust his successor will have a deeper sense of the wrongs of Labour and their remedy than he did.

AMERICAN NOTES.

The United Mine Workers have begun preparations for the erection of a monument at Wilkesbarre, Pennsylvania, to commemorate the eighteen miners killed by a sheriff's posse at Latimer, on September 10th, 1897. The cost of the design selected is about six thousand dollars, and there are eight thousand three hundred dollars already collected. Most of the miners in that district were Poles, Hungarians and Galicians and some four hundred of them marched quietly to the next mine to persuade the men to come out on strike. They were quite unarmed, and as if to show their peaceful intentions were led by two small boys who carried American flags. They were met by Sheriff Martin, of infamous memory, with sixty deputies armed with Winchester rifles. He ordered them to disperse, and as there was some hesitancy owing to the poor fellows not understanding English very well, he ordered his men to fire. As most of the deputies were relations of directors, superintendents, mine bosses, and so on, they fired willingly. The poor miners turned to run, when another volley was fired, with the result that eighteen were killed; all but two or three were afterwards found to be shot in the back. Martin and his men were tried for murder, but were acquitted, of course. We offer our congratulations to the Miners' Union for the monument, and trust it will be a trysting place to those who labour for all time to come, and that it may furnish enthusiasm to those who grow weak and dispirited in the great fight.

Sheriff Martin is a broken man, in ill health, and despised by all who knew him. May his fate be a warning.

Reports of reductions of wages are heard all over the country. Twenty-five per cent. by the Steel Trust, ten per cent. by the American Bridge Company at Pincoyd, Pa.; ten per cent. by the American Car and Foundry Company of Huntington, W. Va., where a thousand men went out on strike; ten per cent. by the Shingle Mills at Bellingham, Wash., where the men are also on strike. The wages of 1,788 employees of the Ohio plant of the Carnegie Company were reduced thirteen to twenty-six per cent. on January 1st, while a general strike is threatened at the Homestead Mills of the same company. The men are not organised, but committees have been appointed to issue an ultimatum to the company, and it is very probable that by the time this is in print the strike will be in force.

There are so many strikes and lock-outs throughout the country that it is impossible to mention more than a few.

It is very encouraging to see the glorious fight the miners are putting up in Colorado against the troops armed to the teeth. This strike, which resembles a civil war, has received scant attention in the daily papers, and if it were not for the Labour papers we would know nothing of it. Martial law has been proclaimed throughout the State, and the troops are arresting strikers on any and every charge they can think of, even including vagrancy. This last may seem very amusing, but it very often means 25 dols. fine or a month breaking stones, so that there is not much humour about it. The men are holding together splendidly in face of all opposition, and are being supported loyally by thousands of trade unionists throughout the country.

H. M. K.

An Appeal to all Sympathisers.

In the present dearth of Libertarian periodicals in this country we have thought it absolutely necessary to bring out the *General Strike* in order to propagate the idea of true liberty, and to counteract the old and worn out legislative method of dealing with the ills from which the people suffer. It will be an uphill struggle, we know, because we have never known a paper advocating an advanced principle to have become self-supporting, and as we do not mean to swerve from the path we mark out to compromise with any party, the life of the paper will depend upon the support it receives from those who sympathise with our ideas.

We feel confident that we will get that support; and to the measure of its extent depends the frequency with which it will appear. At present we can only issue it monthly, but our aim is to make it a weekly paper. All contributions to be sent to S. Mainwaring, 58, Warren Street, Tottenham Court Road, W.

Spain.

THE HOLY INQUISITION IN SPAIN.

After the recent denunciations to the civilised world of the horrors perpetrated on the accused in the monstrous trials of Montjuich and the police plot of the "Black Hand," which compelled the Spanish Government to set free the surviving victims of these trials still in penal servitude, one would hardly have been prepared to believe that the Spanish police and magistrates would resort again to such savage practices. But such is the case.

Numerous workmen, guilty only of participation in strikes, and detained in various Spanish prisons, have related in detail, and with undeniable proofs, the bodily torments to which they have been subjected in order to force them to plead guilty to imaginary crimes or to acts committed by others. These inquisitorial methods have been resorted to chiefly in Alcala del Valle, a little town of Andalusia, where some forty trade unionists have been detained ever since the beginning of last August for participation in the admirable general strike of solidarity, organised to bear exclusively upon the Government, and obtain the release of hundreds of workmen imprisoned without any trial, or without even appearing before a magistrate, simply for having taken part in some strike movement. That splendid act of solidarity had the result expected: the Government had to open the prison doors to its victims, but whenever possible its organisers have been imprisoned and charged with assaulting the police and troops sent against the strikers.

As said above, some forty of them have been arrested at Alcala del Valle. At the end of last month they were tried by court martial at Seville, and sentenced to heavy terms of penal servitude. Why before a court martial? I would ask my English readers. Simply because a common jury would have refused to convict; trial by jury in Spain is reserved for felons only, honest working men are invariably brought before military judges who have been previously instructed to convict.

Before the court martial at Seville our unfortunate comrades denounced the horrible tortures under which they had to declare themselves guilty. Of course they did it more for the sake of the truth than to impress such judges as the military men before whom they stood.

These facts, published first in the Spanish advanced papers, and afterwards reproduced abroad, a campaign of indignation has been raised against the action, in which English trade unionists will certainly join. It is only by making such Governmental crimes known abroad that the Spanish Government will be compelled to cancel the sentences.

GENERAL STRIKE OF DOCKERS.

In all the ports of Spain a general strike of the dockers has recently broken out. The aim of the strikers is to obtain a little amelioration of the precarious conditions under which they work. The energetic attitude they have assumed, the sympathy and the great spirit of solidarity shown to them by workers in other trades, as well as from similar organisations abroad, make us think that they will gain a victory.

POLICE AND DYNAMITE.

Lieutenant Morales, of the police of Barcelona, thought lately to have a little plot all his own. He accordingly arranged with a man he thought reliable to manufacture a few bombs, which he afterward hid and—found! He reported to the governor of the province what he had discovered, and asked for special authority to deal with the Anarchist peril, which was readily granted him. He had little time to abuse it, however, for hardly had he time to arrest a couple of workmen on the charge of having placed these bombs than his man turned traitor and told the whole story. Lieutenant Morales has been arrested, and his promotion as a captain will not be, this time, the outcome of his too clever stratagem.

T. del M.

THE GENERAL STRIKE IN LATIN AMERICA.

L'Homme Libre, of Paris, publishes some very interesting information relative to a general strike of a certain magnitude which has recently broken out in Buenos Ayres, the capital of Argentina.

That strike began among the cabinet makers, the object of which was to obtain a reduction in working hours and an increase of wages. One of the masters being a personal friend of the President of the Republic, troops were easily obtained and used against the strikers to prevent picketing and other operations necessary in such circumstances.

As a protest against such conduct of the authorities, the dockers resolved to come out on strike and support their comrades, the cabinet makers. In answer to that move of the dockers, 1,200 Indians were

engaged by the masters for work in the port. It was then that the entire working population declared a general strike. The number of men out is, according to the latest, 56,000.

The Government threw their entire weight on to the side of the employers; and police and soldiers were savagely used against the strikers, but up to the present with very little result.

Undaunted, our comrades do not confine themselves to platonic protestations against the conduct of the authorities. A few scabs were available for work in the docks, and some ships were being loaded and unloaded. Our friends issued a manifesto threatening to blow up with dynamite any ship venturing to leave the port. After this no ship ventured to leave. The same with the tramways. A few cars were running; the strikers seized them, drove them out of town and threw them over a precipice, and that act effectually stopped the traffic.

It is only a little over a year ago since the first general strike in Buenos Ayres, the one referred to above being the second. The strikers partially succeeded in their claims, but after the fray was over Parliament took the matter in hand and passed a series of restrictive measures against the liberty of the workers, principally against the new comers who were not yet naturalised, and who, if suspected of holding Socialist or Anarchist opinions, were liable to expulsion from the country.

As our good friend and comrade, Felix B. Basterra, informs us in an interesting study recently published at Montevideo, these special laws have never been put into practice owing to the intelligent resistance of the organised workers, and after a few attempts, the Government were fain to let them drop.

While the idea of a general strike is as yet but little known in England, there is hardly a single country in Latin America (I mean by Latin America all the regions once colonised by the Spanish or the Portuguese) where it has not been tried and found to yield good results.

It is not my purpose to write here the history—however interesting it may be—of all these gigantic struggles. I may, perhaps, say a little more about them when the *General Strike* shall be enlarged to eight pages. I will only mention the most important.

At the Valparaiso (Chile) strike of the dockers, followed, for solidarity sake, by most of the other trades of the town, and after suffering good deal of brutality at the hands of the police and the army, against whom the men bravely fought, the strikers carried almost all their points.

At Havana (Cuba) a general strike took place last year, during which two of the men, although unarmed, were murdered by the police. The feeling of indignation raised by that crime was so strong that the masters had to give in.

At Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) the *Amigo do Povo* informs us that a general strike of a few days has been sufficient to obtain advantages that several partial strikes, during the last decade have failed to gain.

It is interesting to note that a very short time only has been needed to make the working population of Latin America fully grasp the idea of the advantages of the general strike over the partial strike, and to put it into practice.

J. A.

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