

# THE MINERS' STRUGGLE IN ENGLAND

## The Leaders and the Masses in the Miners' Struggle.

By A. Lozovsky.

It is now six months since fighting activities began in the British mining industry. A paradox underlies the whole unheard-of length of the strike: that is the lack of correlation between the leaders and the masses, the general staff and the army. Of course the miners' leaders are head and shoulders above the leaders of the General Council and other trade unions. But the tragedy is that they have not risen to the occasion, that they run in traditional harness, all the time casting backward glances, apologising for every bold gesture and word, ready to come to any compromise; that they seek for a united front with the leaders, all the time listening to the whispers of "society"; that they neither will nor can understand that the strike, from the very first day, stepped out of the narrow framework of trade-union traditions, and took on a profoundly political character.

This difference between the attitude of the leaders and that of the masses was strikingly evident at the last miners' conference. While the leaders, Cook among them, came to the conference in a depressed mood, the ordinary workers, straight from the battlefield, were permeated with a fighting spirit. They listened gloomily to defeatist statements and urged a practical programme for the struggle. The gist of this programme may be shortly stated thus: if we fight at all, we'll fight to a finish.

It would seem that after the Conference's decision there was nothing left for the Executive Committee of the Miners' Federation but to put into practice the suggestions carried, among which one of the most important was the decision to call out the safety men. But Smith, Cook and other members of the Executive Committee, instead of carrying out the decisions taken, embarked on a policy of sabotage and this meant a heavy blow for the enemies of the strike. Instead of removing this category of workers from their post, which might have decided the struggle in a very short time, the leaders of the Miners' Federation intensified propaganda and agitation, deciding to substitute for a programme of action feats of oratory. Of course propaganda and agitation play a very great role in the organisation of the attack on the mine-owners but the leaders' misfortune consists in that they themselves by the very intensification of agitation and propaganda contradict their programme of action.

On the other hand the leaders of the Miners' Federation again turned to the General Council with the proposal to take up, at last, the organisation of assistance. The General Council offered to convoke a special conference of T. U. executive bureaux on the 3rd of November, for the consideration of ways and means of affording every possible assistance to the Miners' Federation. In order that there should be no sort of doubt as to the character of the assistance suggested, Arthur Pugh came forward with an explanation that "the question of the embargo will not be considered at the coming conference of Trade Unions, but that the General Council will take immediate steps for the establishment of connections with the trade unions concerned. It must be admitted of the English leaders that they are very coolheaded men and do not lose their heads when it is a question of affording help to strikers: Arthur Pugh promises to "get into contact", and Cook, for unknown reasons, is "extremely satisfied with the decisions of the General Council". This same Pugh came forward in the "Times" with a new project of agreement while the Bourgeois press gave a fair enough estimation of the coming conference of Trade Union Executive Committees on the basis of this last declaration of Pugh's. The newspapers express their supposition — more than well-founded — that the General Council will probably convert the special conference of T. U. Executive Committees into "a shop for bargaining" with the miners. The General Council has been nothing but a petty shop during the whole miners' strike. Every time it has interfered it has played the role of agent for the mine-owners, demanding concessions, from the Miner's Federation. It would seem that experience ought to have taught both Smith and Cook that there is nothing to be expected from the General Council, that every new encounter with the General Council confuses matters, that every re-appearance on the scene of Messrs. Pugh, MacDonald and Thomas is a new blow at the miners, and nevertheless the miners' leaders continue this game.

Moreover the miners' leaders not only pretend that they are "extremely satisfied" with the General Council's decisions but jump at any move made by any public figure, thus making it quite clear that they are ready to make concessions. Towards the end of the sixth month of the strike Lord Derby appeared on the scene in the role of an angel of peace. "I am profoundly convinced", pronounced this amateur middle-man "that even now means of reconciling the conflicting interests of the mine-owners and miners might be found and that peace might be concluded on terms satisfactory to both sides. But I don't care to take the chance of coming forward with suggestions unless I am asked to".

The miners' leaders are unable to understand that Lord Derby came forward with his "peaceful" suggestions by way of a division of labour with Joynson Hicks. For while Lord Derby carols "Peace, perfect peace" Joynson Hicks is not letting the grass grow under his feet. There have already been cases of firing on the strikers, hundreds of picketers have been arrested, meetings forbidden in the mining districts as to all of which the miners' leaders, arriving at meetings fresh from the field of action, could convince themselves if they liked. Joynson Hicks declared in the name of the government "we will place at the disposal of all wishing to work the whole power and strength of the government and we will provide defence for all those who wish to work". On this understanding orders were given to the chief of police in all mining districts. The prohibition of meetings and the increasing of military and police detachments follow on the ag-

gressive tactics of the government. And at that very moment when pressure on the part of the government grows stronger and stronger, at that very moment when millions of miners have been converted into helpless slaves, when they have been deprived of their elementary rights — in that very moment the leaders of the Miners' Federation continue to abstain from carrying into practice the decisions taken at the last Conference. This intentional spinning-out of the most important question made it possible for the government to make its preparations: at present special military detachments have been sent to all mining districts, to substitute the workers guarding the safety of the mines. In the event of these workers being removed from their posts. We thus see a well thought-out campaign on the part of the government, a campaign which will stop at nothing, a tremendous will to struggle in the mining masses, and a perpetual uninterrupted wobbling among the leaders, a wobbling which threatens to ruin the whole miners' movement.

At the same time the outlook is by no means as dark for the miners. The Labour Research Department published, in the beginning of October a White Paper (The Coal Shortage), showing why the miners must win. From this White Paper it is evident that the position of English national economy is becoming daily more and more acute. Of all the coal produced in 1924 (268 million tons), 188 millions went on home demands. Thus in six months of strike a deficit of more than 90 million tons has arisen\*), not counting export. Up to the 1st of October "black" coal was imported to the amount of 12 million tons; if we consider the imports for October to be equal to that of September, by the end of six months 17 million tons will have been imported. If we add to this amount the "black" coal produced in England itself, (about 2 million tons in the last two months) such a vast hole appears that not all the threats of Joynson Hicks can fill up. The influence of the strike on English national economy is already much more destructive than the last earthquake was to Japan. The position of the metal workers is especially catastrophic. From January to April 1926, 147 furnaces producing 538 thousand tons of cast-iron and 697 thousand tons of steel, were working, and in August only six furnaces, producing 14 thousand tons of cast-iron and 52 thousand tons of steel, were working. If we enumerate one branch of industry after another, we shall be convinced of the mortal blow dealt by this strike at the most important branches of industry in England.

What does this strike cost to English national economy? "The Financial News" of the 7th October maintains that the strike costs three million pounds a day. The president of the Federation of British Industries, Muspratt, fixes the cost of the strike up to the beginning of October at 561 million pounds. Even if we accept the more modest figure of the "Financial News", it is evident that by the end of October the strike will have cost more than 500 million pounds — in other words — more than two Japanese earth-quakes. Finally we may quote the opinion of a very prominent member of the English Government. "The stand-still of work for a period of two to three weeks", said Winston Churchill, on the 29th of May in this year, "is a matter that can be mended, eight to ten weeks would leave a deep mark on the life of the whole nation and twelve to fourteen weeks would probably lead the country to such a pass that it could only recover in two or three years. The whole point is the duration of the strike. A continuous interruption in the production of coal is equal to the ruin of the whole economic life of the country." We are quite in agreement with Churchill that "the whole point is the duration of the strike". As for the duration Churchill has received, as we see, complete satisfaction. The six months strike has created new economic circumstances in England. However the import of foreign coal may increase it cannot satisfy the normal demands of English national economy. These facts and figures taken by us from the White Paper of the Labour Research Department, show that circumstances in themselves are favourable to the strikers. To these circumstances must be added a subjective factor — the appreciation on the part of the miners' leaders of the necessity of not crossing the will to struggle of the masses. We criticise in a comradely spirit Cook and the other miners' leaders because they:

\*) From this sum must be subtracted that quantity of coal (about 14 million tons in six months) which was used on the working of the mines.

1. Have not, from the very beginning, understood the profoundly political character of the struggle;
2. Refused to criticise the treacherous General Council;
3. Made a united front with the leaders, instead of appealing over their heads to the masses;
4. Refused to bring forward the question of the general strike at Bournemouth, thus saving the skins of those who betrayed the strike from the first day;
5. Jumped at isolated expressions of Baldwin's, at the suggestions of the clergy and others, distracting the attention of the masses from the immediate struggle.
6. Did not come forward themselves and prevented others from coming forward on the question of the miner's fight at the Margate conference;
7. Refused to carry out in practice the decisions of the miner's conference as to the calling out of the safety men.

This list might be enlarged, but the points enumerated are enough. The leaders of the Miners' Federation, with all their personal sincerity and passionate desire to win the struggle, several times acted in such a way as to strike against the interests of the miners, and to make it still more difficult for the masses to achieve victory. This divergency between the masses and their leaders has made itself felt during the length of the whole six months of struggle. Up to the present, whenever hesitation began among the leaders, intense pressure came from below and the ranks were brought into line. A moment so critical has arrived that it demands especial steadiness, special self-control, special intuition and far-sightedness from the leaders. The following may, without fear of error, be said: If the miners' strike is lost, it will not be because of lack of energy and self-control of the masses, but because of the weakness of the leaders. Let us hope that the mining masses of England will once more correct the mistakes of their leaders and bring the struggle to a favourable end.