

The Outlook in South Wales

RECENT happenings on the South Wales coalfield have drawn our attention towards that storm centre of the class-struggle, and have, in all probability caused some people who do not know the position of affairs in that area to readjust their views on the relative strength and influence of Socialist and reactionary ideas amongst the Welsh miners. To the writer, who has spent weeks at a time in the company and in the homes of the workers of Glamorgan and Monmouth, and has found there inspiration and encouragement such as he has vainly sought anywhere else except, perhaps, on the Clyde, the result of the ballot on the policy to be adopted in regard to the threatened Comb-Out did not come as a surprise, still less as a disappointment. He anticipated the great majority against it, and foretold it. He has had no illusions as to the volume of anti-war or pacifist opinion in the country, and knows that there is a great distance to travel before weariness and "that fed-up feeling" develop into outspoken and active hostility. He does not believe that the psychology of the people holds out any appreciable encouragement to those who preach peace-by-negotiation, and he regards such agitation as being largely waste of effort. He has, therefore, persistently declined to dissipate his energies or exhaust his time in engaging in it. It is no use trying to stop the Flying Scotchman in full career by throwing one's arms round the smokestack.

The opponents of the "rank and file movement" steadily confused the public in South Wales as to the identity and aims of this school, representing them as Pacifists, one in spirit and thought with the N.C.F., the U.D.C., and other similar individualist organizations. They poured out through the columns of an "impartial" Press and the mouths of "disinterested" politicians a devastating torrent of lies, misrepresentations and irrelevancies. The officials of the miners' organization were, in their corporate capacity, and in the main as individuals, bitterly opposed to the younger men.

Naturally, the miners, brought under an incessant, day-and-night barrage of propaganda, which could not be effectively answered owing to the state of the law, believed if they voted in favour of downing tools in the event of the authorities removing men who had come into the mines since 1914, that steam coal production must, of necessity, cease, the Fleets of the Allies be held up, the Germans invade us, and the cause of Freedom and Justice be irretrievably lost. They could not in the circumstances possibly be convinced that this would never be allowed to result if they presented as firm a front as the bankers and the coalowners would have done—and have done under similar circumstances, when it has been a question of "combing out" fortunes over £41,000.

This was the juncture at which the coalowners and such disinterested politicians as Major David Davies, Sir C. J. Cory, and the Marquis of Bute, and such pure and not so simple patriots as Sir H. M. Jackson, of the Ebbw Vale Co. and the Newport Tribunal, desired to have a ballot. The "boss" class has not read Professor Munsterburg on *Industrial Psychology*, nor decided to make this science a part of the training of mine managers, without knowing a thing or two about the ways of human brain work. If this class is not brainy it knows how to buy embodiments of that useful quality. To say the least, it was unfortunate that the strategy of the rank and file movement should have resulted in their being forced to fight on such unfavourable ground and at such an unripe time. The Italian débâcle contributed in some measure to the victory of the disinterested ones. It is to be sincerely hoped that our comrades will take the lesson to heart in future campaigns and thus perfect their industrial strategy. More than all else, let us hope that it will teach our pacifist friends that their tactics and their ideas have no attraction for the working class, and that they are alien to the minds of the proletariat, however proper they were to those of the small traders and their kind. However, they will reply that Merthyr and Aberdare proved to be the strongest in support of a "down tools" policy. It would be strange if all the work of the I.L.P. and the Hardie tradition, the great Rink meetings, and the years of literature and lectures had had no effect. In other areas, where customary I.L.P. methods of propaganda have been in vogue as long as those of the C.L.C. class system in the Rhondda, the results have not justified any such confidence in the efficiency of the former. Merthyr, Aberdare, and Dowlais have historic traditions and a Radical tendency which go far to explain matters.

The size of the minority vote is by no means disconcerting to those who know the ground and who recognise that great and enthusiastic audiences are often a very mixed lot and comprise a very small proportion of the whole population.

The "boss" class fully understand the enormous importance of the South Wales "front" in the class struggles of the future. In the writer's opinion it would be difficult to overrate the part which Glamorgan and Monmouth are destined to play in the industrial development of the next quarter of a century. Our people must realise the all-importance of technical transformations and the change in the methods, the processes, and the mechanism of the means of production. It is these which, in the final analysis, determine the development of ideas, institutions, and all the super-structure of society. Having that conviction firmly in his mind, and basing his whole socialist method on the Materialist Conception of history, the writer has studied the phenomena of South Wales industrial evolution in the written word of capitalist books and periodicals, and in the concrete evidence of that evolution in the

valleys themselves. In the housing conditions, in the habits, customs, religions, in the town planning, in the works location and expansion, in the means of transport, in the use of waste, and in the neglect or abuse of natural advantages, he has been searching for the clue to industrial and social progress. The problems of Alsace-Lorraine, of Morocco, of Asia Minor, of Tariff Reform, have resolved themselves into observing the development of the coal export and iron import trade, the exhaustion of the native numerical resources, the necessities of the copper refineries and the difficulties of the tin-plate, chemical and iron and steel industries. The prospect of labour organization have become clearer in studying the correlation of coal, iron, steel, ferro-concrete, engineering, railway, harbour-shipping, ship-repairing, tar-distilling, by-product manufacture, chemical industry, metal refining, power raising, lighting, tramway, motor transport, and other branches of production. Amongst other conclusions he has arrived at the writer would emphasise (i.) the importance of the Admiralty decision to introduce ship-building—standard ships—to South Wales for the first time; (ii.) the growing habit of ocean steamship lines to acquire interests in Cardiff and Newport, probably with the view of coaling there; (iii.) the alliances between N.E. Coast and South Wales coal and iron masters; (iv.) the coming expansion and recuperation of metal and chemical industry on Swansea Bay; (v.) the fact that there are now nine by-product plants on the coalfield and that there is a scheme afoot for a central by-product, waste heat and power plant in the Taff Vale; (vi.) the alliance of the Rhondda interests in coal with shipping, newspaper and industrial and pharmaceutical chemists' enterprise; (vii.) the activity in colliery enterprise of the Ebbw Vale Co. and the close connections of Baldwins' with the Federation of British Industries and the Ministry of Munitions; (viii.) the future development of the coal areas in the Ely, Ogmore, Avon, and Rhymney Valleys, and (ix.) the sinister activity of Tupper, Stanton, and others in conjunction with members of great capitalist concerns like the Shipping Federation on the coast.

These matters all call for speedy attention, inquiry, caution, and foresight on the part of Marxists in the South Wales coalfield.

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

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