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CONSCRIPTION — of LABOUR



WORKERS DEFEND YOUR LIBERTIES!

The Government and its propaganda agencies constantly demand that the common people must make sacrifices in order to win the war.

In the belief that the war is being waged to stop the onward rush of Fascism and Nazism, the workers are risking their lives and shouldering the added burdens which war inevitably brings in its train.

The cost of living is rising, heavier burdens are progressively being imposed by taxation.

More and more men and women by various insidious methods are being driven into the ranks of the combatants. But there are many indications that, under cover of war necessities, sinister and persistent attacks are being made on the working and living conditions of the workers.

In short, whilst the people are being urged to fight Fascism and Nazism in various foreign countries, the Government is introducing that accursed regime into South Africa.

The latest, and the most dangerous, example of this policy is the issue in the Union Gazette of 13th February of regulations for the control of industrial man power.

No such regulations have been made to control the vast wealth which flows into the pockets of the capitalists from the labour of the toiling people on the land and in the mines, railways and factories.

In the face of these facts and the gross injustice to the workers of these regulations, it is regrettable that the officials of the Trades and Labour Council and Cape Federation have given their whole-hearted support to them.

What do these regulations propose?

Firstly, the Minister of Defence may declare any industry to be a controlled industry by notice in the Gazette.

A Controller of Industrial man power (Mr. Ivan Walker) has been appointed, who, under the regulations, is given dictatorial

powers over the workers. He may shift any man from any job to another job in such controlled industries without giving that man any right to appeal to any other authority or Court of Law.

This means that a man can be compelled to leave his wife and family or other dependents, and put to work hundreds of miles from his home. No Provision is made that his pay shall not be reduced, nor that he will be given the work to which he is accustomed. Neither is any provision made for an allowance to meet the added expense of keeping up two homes. If he decides to take his dependants with him when transferred, no allowance is made for their fares or cost of removing his household goods.

Many workers have been encouraged to acquire their dwellings on the hire-purchase system. This means that in order to meet the monthly instalments on the mortgage, the conscripted worker must let his house if he can, in which case the house will deteriorate and the rent may not be paid; or otherwise he must dispose of it in a forced sale, which will probably not realise more than the amount of the bond.

In other words, he will lose a life's savings, besides being torn away without his consent from surroundings to which he has become accustomed.

Further, no guarantee is given that when the war ends he will be reinstated in his old job, if, as is almost certain, the war work for which he has been conscripted, comes to an end.

Victimisation of Shop Stewards

But the power given to the Controller may be used in order to victimise any worker who shows any tendency to criticise the actions of his employer or the Government and its officials.

In England, similar powers are given, not to the Minister for War, be it noted, but to the Minister of Labour, Mr. Bevin. What has happened there?

Active shop stewards have systematically been victimised by transferring them to distant localities. Further, in the place of the shop stewards and Workshop Committees which proved themselves, both during the last and in the present war, the greatest safeguards against injustices on the job, Bevin is setting up "Councils of employers and workers" in the engineering industry.

These Councils are composed of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers, and are to consider, amongst other matters, dilution, absenteeism, and "subversive influences" in the factories. This scheme is on all fours with the Labour Front in Germany, and is a long step towards Nazification of the factories.

Engineers in particular, being engaged in a key industry, must oppose all such proposals to abolish their hard-won Trade Union rights.

Compare the above callous and unjust treatment of the workers in South Africa with the regulations governing transferred workers in the Soviet Union. There the Government pays the travelling expenses of the worker and his family when transferred to a new place of employment; the cost of transporting his effects; full wages, plus a special daily allowance en route; monetary aid for setting up his new home equal to three or four months' wages, according to district, and one-quarter of his monthly earnings for each member of the family who moves to the new place of employment. These amounts are not deducted from future earnings.

Workers, be on your Guard!

Demand! that there shall be no Government control of industrial man power without a corresponding and rigid control of the wealth of the rich.

It should be noted that the Minister referred to in the regulations is the Minister of Defence and not of Labour, and his first consideration, of course, will be military needs, not the interests of the worker.

The Minister is to appoint a Labour Control Board, consisting of equal numbers of employees and employers. This Board will only be a consultative Board; it only has power to report and recommend; the final decision in all cases rests with the Controller.

The Board only functions when the Controller submits for its consideration a "matter of principle or a matter directly affecting established working conditions."

In any controlled industry no worker may be engaged, resign, or be discharged without the prior consent of the Controller. This means, fellow-worker, that you are no longer free to take on a job that suits you, or to leave a job that does not suit you. If a better job is offered you, you cannot accept it without the consent of the Controller.

The Controller has power to regulate the rate of pay of workers, fix their hours of work, and lay down any other conditions of employment which do not fall under agreements under the Industrial Conciliation Act. He may force the settlement of any dispute in any controlled establishment where it may directly or indirectly affect the labour available for the making of munitions. This means, fellow-worker, that your right to strike is taken away; striking becomes an offence, and the "offender" is liable on conviction to a fine of £100 or twelve months, or both fine and imprisonment.

A very significant provision is contained in Section 6 (j) which reads that the Controller has the power to suspend or terminate the employment of any worker in any establishment. This appears to mean that, whether the establishment is or is not in a controlled industry, employees fall under this power of the Controller.

The penalty indicated in the case of a strike applies to an infringement of any of these regulations.

It is inevitable that such regulations being in the hands of a capitalist Government will be harshly administered in the case of the workers, and very leniently in the case of the employers. We are, therefore, bitterly opposed to the whole of the regulations.

But the following proposals, if adopted and honestly carried out, will tend to mitigate some of the inevitable injustices and hardships of the regulations.

We, therefore, demand that:—

- (a) The regulations should be administered by the Department of Labour, and not of Defence.
- (b) The Labour Control Board should be composed of workers' representatives only, who should be directly appointed by the workers. No employers to be on the Board. A separate Board to be set up to deal with employers.
- (c) The Board should have greater powers, i.e., should not be merely consultative, but should have power to take decisions, not merely on what are called "matters of principle," but on objections coming from workers in the form of appeal against decisions of the Controller.
- (d) Men shifted from one job to another should be guaranteed wages not less than those they received in the job from which they were transferred. In the case of men shifted into a different district the cost of removal for themselves, family and dependents, if any, and furniture, should be borne by State and employers.
- (e) In the case of a man owning a house, some provision should be made to compensate him for any costs involved in removal or losses sustained.
- (f) No man shall be shifted from his job because of carrying out his duties as shop steward or other Trade Union activities.
- (g) A man removed from one sphere of employment to another, shall be guaranteed the right to return at the end of the war to former work, if he so desires.

★ Workers! Unite to defend your hard-won trade union rights.

★ Whilst fighting Fascism abroad, make sure that the vicious system is not introduced at home.

★ REMEMBER: The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.