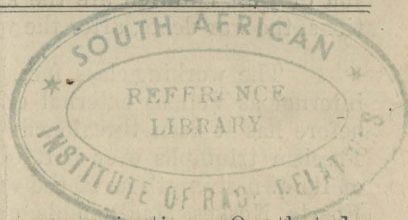


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WORKERS OF SOUTH AFRICA, AWAKE!



MAY DAY.

The 1st of May has long been consecrated to the idea of working-class emancipation. On that day the idea of working-class solidarity first permeated the millions of wage slaves.

It is the birthday of the future Workers' Commonwealth, and it is on this day more than on any other that this idea has grown and is still growing. It is a wonderful day, because it is not a national holiday nor a religious holiday. Its importance is so great because it is not observed in any one particular country or by any one denomination. It is so great a day because it is just Labour Day.

THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION.

May Day in 1934 finds the world in the fifth year of what they call an "economic crisis," which has possession of both hemispheres. All the world is thrown out of gear. In vain they try to adjust things by curtailing agricultural and industrial production, by inflating the currency, by imposing high tariffs. In vain are Conferences held in Ottawa, London, Montevideo. World production and world trade are still falling. These artificial means to recovery, like the plausible announcements in the capitalist press that "we have already turned the corner," cannot bring relief and prosperity to suffering humanity. For it is not only an economic crisis, a result of over-production. It is not only a financial crisis, a result of the war debts, the reparations, the consequent wranglings, the changes in the value of money. It is not only a political crisis, a result of the Versailles system and the unjust distribution of colonies and the collapse of democracy. No! Those who say so mislead you. The crisis is the crisis of Capitalism, which is rotting and breaking up, and whose stench becomes unbearable.

In a world which is better equipped than ever before to supply to ALL its inhabitants the means of living, we see the distress, misery, starvation of tens of millions of unemployed, and the gradual driving below the bread line of the workers who are still employed. The best brains of the scientific servants of capitalism are engaged in lowering the number of calories absolutely necessary for maintaining existence. In their eyes the bread line is still too high!

But there is a worse mockery. While millions upon millions of people in the world are starving for lack of the necessities of life, the capitalists of all countries are assembling in Conference Halls and bargaining for the restriction of the production, the output of those necessities. They restrict the acreage to be given to the production of wheat, maize, sugar, cotton; they limit the output of oil and coal. The so-called "surplus" of these necessities is not given to the needy masses, but is dumped into the sea, or used as fuel for the railways, or just destroyed.

Capitalists are well aware of the approaching end of their long period of power, but the faster their whole system rots and gives way, the more desperately they cling to the oppressive methods of their rule.

Only incurable Utopians of the Fabian brand, or nice-minded Liberals who are still in the Victorian age, believe in social reform, in gradual developments, or miracles of democracy. The capitalists are doing away with democracy just as an actor wipes off the make-up that has helped him to play his part.

Caught in a crisis, the capitalist turns to crude force; he knows no other way out than that of war. But he knows also that the indignation of the hungry and oppressed masses of the workers and toiling peasants is coming to boiling point. Therefore he must break up their organisations, he must destroy their solidarity, he must further subject and enslave them. Thus only can he prolong his rule and secure the supply of helpless cannon fodder that war demands. Hence comes Fascism—the bloody dictatorship of Capitalism.

WHAT FASCISM MEANS TO THE WORKER.

Fascism is the iron heel of Capitalism on the throat of the workers. Under Fascist rule the militant workers are thrown into gaol or into concentration camps, or are slain outright. Fascism abolishes the working-man's Trade Unions and Political Parties, his libraries and savings banks, his co-operative institutions, his recreation and sports organisations. Fascism seeks to disintegrate the working-class, the only progressive class in society, the class which, born from the womb of capitalism, must take its own place and fulfil its own historic task—to do away with classes, exploitation, and oppression, and establish a socialistic, classless society.

But this is the very development that capitalism is determined to prevent. Social democracy is no longer a useful tool and therefore is discarded. Then Fascism appears, to save Capitalism and lead the worker to the battlefields for the glory of the fatherland, for the aggrandisement of the Imperialist State, and for the swollen profits of the capitalists. For the workers, Fascism in peace time means loss of their rights as freemen, and cuts in their wages till they sink to the lowest level. When the hour of war strikes, they will be herded as mobs of cattle for the slaughter-house.

And on this point of war do not be misled. War is at our doors. We can hear the warning of the coming volcanic eruption, the noise of the clash of nations. The lessons of 1914 are forgotten. A new wave of fervid, narrow patriotism is sweeping over the world, preparing minds for hatred, madness, barbarism. Public opinion will be hammered into the desired shape by the politicians, the press, the Church, the wireless, the bioscope—all the ideological tools of capitalism. Only a fool can believe that the armaments of his nation are for the preservation of peace. Look at the growing armies, navies, air-fleets, the bigger guns, the thicker armour. Think of the gas war, the bacillus war. And remember that every gun is made, not for show, but to kill, to destroy. Remember the crippled, remember the blinded, and remember the promises made to you in 1914.

YOU are the chief sufferer from the evil effects of the crisis in time of peace, and YOU are the chief sufferer from the effects of war. The burden of armament budgets is laid on your shoulders before the war, you or your children are the killed, the wounded, the crippled in the war, and you pay the cost, the reparations, the war debts, after the war. In a word, you are always and in every way the losers.

The working class faces May Day this year in the midst of an International Reaction, in a period of internal as well as external crisis. Never since 1914 has the working-class faced such a difficult time. Never before has it been threatened with such attacks from without and disintegration from within. Already Fascism triumphs over half of Europe, and menaces every other country of the world, a result not so much of its own strength as of the workers' weakness and disintegration, a result of betrayal on the part of the Eberts, Noskes, MacDonalds, and Thomases, a result of the treacherous role played by the Second International, beginning with the 4th of August, 1914, and on up to the 30th of January, 1933, and a result of the impotence and incompetence of the bureaucracy of the Third International.

To-day, then, we see that the dark powers of the world, inspired by the victories of Fascism in Germany and Austria, are busily putting their heads together, now in Rome, now in London, now in Paris or Berlin, plotting a new Holy Alliance from East and West, under the aegis of Britain, a crusade against the only living stronghold of the proletariat, Soviet Russia.

The duty of all class-conscious workers is to unmask the plots of the Imperialist dark powers and to defend with their heart's blood the only fatherland of the worker, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

THE SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Here in South Africa the outlook for the worker continually grows darker. Like the result of the world South Africa is suffering from the crisis of Capitalism. Thousands of white and coloured unemployed are daily registering at the Labour Bureaux; tens of thousands of Native unemployed are not even taken into account. The "Poor White" population is increasing fast, but as yet no Government has come forward with a solution to this menacing problem.

Hundreds of thousands of Natives are living on the border of starvation, working at a "bob-a-day" job on the farms, or at half-a-crown or less as town labourers, or back in the Native Territories, trying to grow maize or rear sheep on the overcrowded, overstocked, impoverished soil. From such relief measures as the Government has evolved, the Natives have for the most part been shut out.

Even more deplorable is the state of Native Education. The clumsy plan by which it is financed makes no provision for school buildings, or for the natural increase of population, much less for the extension of education to areas hitherto neglected. Less than 25 per cent. of Native children of school-going age get any schooling at all, and of these very few indeed get any opportunity of going beyond Standard 2. Accommodation as a rule is pitifully inadequate; there is such a lack of furniture that the pupils are often huddled on the floor; there is a dreadful shortage of all the ordinary class requisites; the number of teachers is glaringly insufficient; their pay is scandalously low. The amount of the Native Education Grant has actually decreased during the last two years. And now the Recess Committee of the Bunga (the General Council of the United Transkeian Territories) reports that of late years the standard of Native education has been deliberately lowered.

Let all workers take warning. This degradation of the Native cannot but have an injurious effect on all the workers of South Africa. The low standard of living forced on the black workers will eventually drive the white workers down to the same level, unless the white worker takes his courage in both hands and assists the Native to a position by his side. Remember the blunt old saying: "You cannot go on holding a man down in a ditch without getting into it yourself and staying there."

SUCH IS THE POSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA: HOW HAVE OUR RULERS DEALT WITH IT?

They made great efforts to persuade the workers to believe that the depression is only a temporary trouble, that prosperity is "just round the corner." The capitalists, through their agents, the politicians, offered a variety of quack remedies. First, they tried staying on the Gold Standard. Then they got off it in a hurry, in order to ensure for the mine-owners a larger profit. But still prosperity did not return, in spite of reassuring articles in the capitalist press. And still the workers were not at all convinced of the good faith of their rulers. Clearly another move was needed. The agitation for a Coalition Government was promptly begun, for a Government in which the most trusted agents of the Chamber of Mines could be united in a strong Cabinet, powerful enough to overwhelm any possible opposition.

Long before Coalition, however, the Union of South Africa could show some of the most repressive Labour Legislation in the world. The Industrial Conciliation Act, for instance, had paved the way for the complete passivity in which the Trade Unions recline to-day. The (Natives) Urban Areas Act, while it tended to improve the housing conditions of the urban Native, nevertheless placed difficulties in the way of his getting work and harassed his daily life with continual pin-pricks. Two years ago, when harsh amendments to the Natal Native Law Code were under discussion, an ex-Chief Justice of the Union exclaimed in justifiable indignation: "Our land is becoming the home of martial law in perpetuity." The Native Service Contract Act secures for the farmers in Transvaal, Free State, and Natal a steady supply of cheap and undisciplined labour. Other enactments assure the mines of sufficient Native workers for the extraction from the earth of enormous profits for the mine-owners.

For a long time the big farmers, represented by the Nationalist Party, and the mine-owners, represented by the South African Party, had squabbled over the division of the available Native labour. The S.A.P. Government would introduce legislation to force the Natives off the land into the slave compounds of the Rand, while the Nationalists when in power would act as zealous recruiting agents for the platteland.

The Coalition Government was welcomed with acclamation by the mine-controlled newspapers of South Africa. With the exception of a few Afrikaans dailies, they proclaimed the arrival of a wonderful new dawn. Racialism would vanish overnight, unemployment would be tackled in a "national" spirit instead of from the old narrow, party point of view. With all the "best brains" of the country triumphantly assembled in one Cabinet, all the accumulated ills of the people would be rolled away.

Into this Coalition Cabinet were gathered all the "bright boys" of the Chamber of Mines: General Smuts and Patrick Duncan, staunch defenders of the mine-owners' profits in that bloodstained year, 1922, were appointed Minister of Justice and Minister of Mines respectively. General Hertzog, at one time a republican "die-hard," but now an upholder of British Imperialism (represented in South Africa by the Chamber of Mines), was placed at the helm. Oswald Pirow, father of the atrocious Riotous Assemblies Act, is Minister of Railways and Defence.

What has the Coalition Government done to alleviate the distress that prevails in the land?

The Minister of Railways and Defence was one of the most eager among the members of the Cabinet to hasten to the help of the unemployed. By his inspiration unemployed youths, carefully selected, are being organised in military units, which could easily be utilised against the workers in the event of industrial upheavals. All the panegyrics of the capitalist-controlled press cannot conceal the menace to organised workers which is implied by these "Special Service Battalions."

Pending the report of the Committees appointed last year to suggest measures for the social, educational, and economic advance of the "Poor Whites," the Government has set up relief works in many districts. To some at least of these, certain highly objectionable features are attached. In the Clanwilliam area, for example, a party of such workers, earning the miserable wage of 5s. a day, are not being paid in full week by week. While the work is in progress, they receive on pay days only half of what is due to them, the other half being saved for them to take back home when the whole job is finished. In some urban areas similar relief works have been started, the work in some instances being let out to private contractors. Clearly these relief expedients will need careful watching.

Besides the organisation of Special Service Battalions and dubious relief works, what else is being done that bears directly on the welfare of the workers? The answer to that question is a gloomy one.

Without any opposition whatever from the unorganised masses, the ruling classes, working through their obedient servants, the successive South African Governments, prepare fresh assaults on the rights and standards of living of the working-class.

Not satisfied with the Riotous Assemblies Act, which attempts to muzzle the workers, not satisfied with the Colour Bar Act, which helps to divide the workers, not satisfied with the Native Service Contract Act, which turns the Native worker into a serf tied to the soil, and not satisfied with its paralysing machinery of "industrial legislation," the rapacious Coalition Government threatens to deliver further attacks.

The Unemployment Insurance Bill, leaving out altogether the many thousands of labourers, confines its proposals to the better paid workers, who must contribute to the central insurance fund, who are liable to forfeit their benefit if they are discharged or come out on strike, and who, after thirteen weeks of unemployment pay, must take any job that is offered them. This measure of legalised robbery proposes to snatch away the workers' money with one hand and with the other to take from him his right to strike.

The (Natives) Urban Areas Act Amending Bill seeks to restrict still more narrowly the movements of Native labour in search of work, and, if passed, will inevitably give the police increased opportunities of terrorising them. It means that the eyes of the masters must be spared the annoyance of seeing starving Natives in the towns. The Native worker must meekly do his starving out of sight in the country districts.

THE COALITION BUDGET.

The Budget introduced by the Coalition Government is surely a masterpiece of irony. The subservient press hails with joy the reduction of the income tax, the return to penny postage and the penny cheque stamp, as sure signs of returning prosperity. It passes lightly over the bald and ugly fact that this wonderful Budget makes not one single concession to the working-class, to small wage-earners. All goes to big business and the middle class.

SOUTH AFRICAN WORKING-CLASS PARTIES.

The present position of the Labour Movement in South Africa holds out little hope for the workers.

The South African Labour Party is paying the penalty of its opportunism and treachery. Prominently displayed in its programme, side by side with clauses advocating Socialism and other "revolutionary" measures, is a clause which definitely draws a line between the white and black workers, thus dividing the forces of Labour. Since its inception the S.A. Labour Party has acted as a brake on the growth of the working-class movement. Its acts of treachery culminated in the "Pact" of 1924, in direct betrayal of the Party principles and the workers' interests, when the recognised representatives of Labour entered a Capitalist Cabinet. Workers will not have forgotten that one of them, Mr. Walter Madeley, then Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, actually boasted of the complete uniformity of outlook in the Cabinet, saying, in effect, that if you could pop in at a Cabinet meeting, you would not be able to tell which were the Labour Ministers and which were the Nationalists. In other words, the representative of Labour and the representative of Capital spoke with one voice, and it was the voice of Capital.

Though the Labour Party has renounced the Pact, it still keeps the attitude of compromise. It is significant that certain Devolutionists from Natal are desirous of entering its ranks. It would seem, then, that the Labour Party has simply changed the Nationalist ox for the Natal Imperialist donkey. As a Party, it has proved its utter incapacity to lead the South African workers.

On the other hand, the Communist Party has failed to attract to its banner any considerable section of these workers. The failure is due to its obstinate persistence in its policy of errors. The blunders of the Comintern on the International field are reflected in the history of the Communist Party of South Africa. Out of touch with realities, ignoring the special characteristics of South Africa, they carried over into South Africa, in routine fashion, policies which had been uniformly worked out for all countries.

Consider, for instance, their disastrous policy of urging workers to come out from the existing Trades Unions in order to build up new, separate, "Red" Trades Unions. What was the result? The workers of the Left Wing were cut off from the large body of workers; the class-conscious, militant workers were isolated, with little or no opportunity of making their influence felt.

Not less harmful was the reactionary slogan calling for a "Native Republic," a slogan which is in complete contradiction to Marxism-Leninism. For it places at the head of the Revolution the backward Native peasantry, which is by far the dominating element in the Native population, instead of giving the sole leadership in the transition period to the Working-Class, black and white alike. The Communist's cry for a "Native Republic" would doom the Revolution beforehand to failure, for never in past history have the peasants alone been able to carry a revolution to a successful issue.

After the transition period of the Dictatorship of the Working-Class is over, after the danger of a Capitalist Restoration is past, there will still be no need for a "Native Republic." We shall then have a free country as part of the World Federation of Soviet Socialist Republics, wherein there cannot be any racial division between black and white, "Native" and "European."

We see, then, that all the work of the Communist Party of South Africa has been a passive carrying out of instructions from above. Lack of initiative, lack of analysis of the real situation in South Africa, and bureaucratic arrogance—the "Take it or be damned" attitude—absence of any right of discussion, of any party-democracy, and the ruthless expelling of the best brains of the Party for their refusal to follow blindly, reduced the one-time influential Party to a mere shadow of a party, of almost no significance.

WHAT NEXT? THE NEED FOR A NEW PARTY.

After this short survey of the position of the Labour Movement in South Africa, we inevitably come to the question: What next? Where is the way out?

If many in the Working-Class still believed in achieving Socialism by social reforms, gradual developments, the policy of the South African Labour Party, the events of the last few years must have undeceived them. The catastrophe in Germany, the crushing defeat of Socialism in Austria, the breaking up of Democracy in favour of Fascism in England and the United States, and in a score of other countries, South Africa not excluded, have proved conclusively that the policy of the Second International, leads the working-class to enslavement even worse than in the Middle Ages, to an abyss, to destruction. But the Third International, which was supposed to be, and at one time was, the advance guard of the workers, also degenerated to such a degree that it is no longer able to lead, being itself dragged in the wake of the officialdom of the U.S.S.R. And as there is no longer room for the rotting Second International, and no longer hope for the resurrection of the Third, we must start anew.

We shall start, richer for the experience of the past, to build a new Revolutionary International, a new Revolutionary Workers' Party, a party which will be true to the best traditions of Marx and Lenin and their achievement in the October Revolution, a party which will be free from the mistakes of the past, free from bureaucracy, which will strive to win the confidence of the workers and oppressed masses of South Africa, not by decrees, but by convincing and educating to class-consciousness through the class-struggle; a party which will be alive to the needs and sufferings of To-day without losing sight of To-morrow; a party which will be the true advance guard of the proletariat, and lead to the final victory of the working-class and the ultimate emancipation of mankind.

