



Revolutionary Movement in South Africa.

By A Delegate of the League.

THE vast bulk of the proletariat in South Africa is Bantu by race, disfranchised except in the Cape Colony, and labouring under serf conditions of passports, indentures and special penal laws.

The Indian and white workers are in the minority. Pronouncements from the official Labour movement in South Africa should be accepted always with those facts in view: that the illusion of all white master communities, Alienation democracies, that they represent the whole of the people and that the mass of the serfs or slaves beneath them are politically non-existent, to a great extent possesses the white working class movement in South Africa also.

So far the great mass of the native workers, comprising 75% of the proletariat, have not yet attained to a collective voice or to the consciousness of their mission as a class. Peculiar methods of temporary employment in the industries, alternating with periods of return to their native reserves, largely account for this.

The Political Labour Movement.

With the formation of the South African union in 1910 the scattered sections and Trade Councils in the Labour movement in South Africa united into one South African Labour Party, with the Socialist objective in its constitution.

At the 1910 general election the S. A. L. P. returned four members to the Union Parliament. Up to the dissolution of Parliament in 1915, election victories brought the number up to eight members.

Effect of Industrial Upheavals on the Political Movement.

In July 1913 the great strike of the miners, followed by other trades on the rand, took place. It was made notorious throughout the world by the massacre of citizens in the streets of Johannesburg by the Government troops.

In January 1914 another general strike took place (confined, of course, to white workers). The strike was started on the railways, followed by the miners and other trades. The elaborate preparations, by martial law regulations and police suppressions, made by the Government to cope with the strike, brought about a débâcle to the workers, and the deportation of nine strike leaders followed.

In the Provincial Council elections, which came round in March following, the S. A. L. P. drew to

itself all the liberal and labour indignation against the military methods of suppression adopted by the Government, and 23 out of 25 labour candidates were returned to the Transvaal Provincial Council.

This success brought its penalties: The Party was invaded by a large number of political adventurers, so that when the war broke out in August of the same year, it had hardly found time to regain its working class equilibrium.

Nevertheless, ten of its 23 members in the Transvaal Provincial Council voted for an anti-war resolution brought forward in that body. At the annual conference of the Party held in East-London in January 1915 the anti-war section of the Party was in possession of the Party machine and controlled the conference. In spite of the fact that they had an enthusiastic majority behind them, the anti-war section held its hand for the sake of unity, being under the impression that a speedy termination of the war would save the Party.

Comrade W. H. Andrews, spokesman in Parliament for the anti-war section, and chairman of the Party, was reelected chairman at this conference, and an anti-war majority was elected on the Executive.

A resolution was then passed, with only one dissentient, leaving the question of war to be decided by each individual member according to the dictates of his own reason and conscience.

On this compromise the Party worked until Colonel Creswell, its Parliamentary leader, returned from German South-West Africa, in June 1915. The general election for Parliament was due in October, Col. Creswell immediately threw down the challenge to the anti-war section of the Party in a manifesto to the members, urging the Party the "See the War through" policy. A counter-manifesto was issued by 20 prominent members. A special conference was called for August 22nd to decide the Party's election platform.

During the intervening months the press had been at work hurling vituperation at the anti-war Party, and the appeal to passion was reflected at the special conference.

Now the majority had gone over to the "See it Through" Party. The election ruthlessly swept aside all talk of compromise, all consideration for old associations, all desire to make the continuance of the anti-war comrades in the Party easy, all appeal to the deeper things for which the Party had been formed; and all candidates, who would not endorse the "See it Through" policy were turned down.

The Cleavage.

Eight members of the E. C. including the chairman, secretary and treasurer, resigned office.

The anti-war section then formed itself into a body under the name of International League of the S. A. L. P., with the view to carry on the propaganda and retrieve the Party for internationalism. But this could not last. The election fever grew. Almost simultaneously as the League members voted to withdraw from the S. A. L. P. and form a separate organisation, the S. A. L. P. administrative Council voted for the expulsion of all members of the International League. In September 1915 this organisation started as the International Socialist League of South Africa.

Our Organ „The International.“

Immediately after the break away of the socialists, the League started its weekly „The International,“ which is now in its sixth volume. The „Worker,“ the official organ of the S. A. L. P., collapsed in 1915 owing to the conflicting views on the war. Since then the S. A. L. P. has not published a newspaper or official journal of any kind. Our organ „The International“ is absolutely the only working class weekly in South Africa. The League possesses its own printing plant, which is a great help to us in getting our literature out in time.

The peculiar problems, which the socialist movement has to face in South Africa with its black proletariat, accounts for the small circulation of the paper.

Election Results Since Formation of the League.

In the Transvaal Provincial elections in 1917 comrade W. H. Andrews contested the Benoni division, and though defeated by the Labour Party nominee, received a poll of 355 votes, which was of sufficient concern to the capitalist press to cause it to break its conspiracy of silence and inquire into the reasons.

The League fought elections on issues such as „war against war,“ and „industrial unionism against craft unionism,“ which in South Africa, of course implies the native.

In the Benoni election referred to, the League candidate had arrayed against him not only the pro-war passion, but also the anti-native, anti-colour prejudice, which among the Dutch section of the population especially, is exceedingly virulent. With the increasing popularity of international socialism the appeal to colour prejudice is being resorted to more and more by the enemies of the working class, the more dangerous we become.

This weapon was used against us with such an effect at the Benoni election by the Labour Party, that the whole of the Dutch vote, which was anti-war as far as it is anti-British and petty bourgeois, was alienated from the League.

Anti-colour prejudice was used by the L. P. in the elections mentioned, and it became their chief

weapon in the general election in March of this year, 1920. The League fought that election with five candidates in the field. The election platform was: the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

As the immense majority of the S African proletariat are members of the Bantu races, it is obvious that the native question in regard to Soviets was brought more than ever to the foreground.

South Africa, like Russia, possesses a large rural population, and in our case, as in Russia, the proletariat in practice would include not only the industrial workers, but the small peasants and landless agriculturists as well, who again in our country to a large extent are non-European.

All these elements, irrespective of colour, are to make up the „ruling class,“ whose dictatorship and mastery of the productive forces of society is the first step in the working class revolution.

It is this stumbling block that makes the socialist problem seem so insoluble and difficult in South Africa, where most white wage earners, if not actually property owners, aspire to that status and absorb the ideology of the petty bourgeois. Yet any working class movement that ignores or shirks the organisation of the native worker is a sham.

Any revolution leaving out the lower stratum to the rest would at the bottom be one of a bourgeois nature, perpetuating the antagonism, on which present society is based.

This the vote catching Labour Party, playing up to the white trade unionists and the whites in general, refuses to see. It preaches the segregation of the natives, which spells cheap labour. Because it is a well known fact, that the whites could not last one week without the natives. This has been proved by big strikes of native workers on the gold mines and during the March 1920 general election campaign.

To the shame of the white miners, they scabbed on the native workers. The League, notwithstanding the fact, that during the election campaign it had been under the constant fire of colour prejudice both of the press and Labour Party on account of our native policy, immediately issued a leaflet, calling upon the white miner not to scab upon his black fellow worker. (See „International“ 224).

The S. A. L. P. not only dissociated itself from this great native strike, but it went to great pains to prove, that these wicked International Socialists were behind it all. It resulted in the breaking up of our election meetings by organised gangs led by prominent Labour Party members. Large numbers of our supporters at other times, having been hit in one way or another by the native strike and who have the petty bourgeois penchant of repeating revolutionary phrases, voted for the Labour Party. On the eve of the poll Col. Creswell, the leader of the Labour Party, in a manifesto, issued in the capitalist press, declared for the maintenance of imperial connections between S. A. and Great Britain. This manifesto, combined with the fear on the part of the English population that the Dutch Nationalist Party, fighting for an independent „South African Republic,“ might win the day, finally drew to the Labour Party a large num-

ber of British nationalist voters. The Labour Party returned eighty one members to the Union Parliament.

Notwithstanding our overwhelming defeat, the fight we put up has been very valuable and we are gratified in being able to state, that the principle of solidarity of labour irrespective of race or colour is making headway among the white workers.

If election results are to be the index of power, then the S. L. P. counts for little as yet in the South African working class movement. But if the degree of working class revolutionary effort is to be accounted for, then the immensity of colour prejudice it has to face, its great propaganda work both by public meeting and written word and the fact that it sustains, through the self sacrifice of its members, the main South African working class paper, places the International Socialist League as the one vigorous political organisation of the workers of South Africa.

The theatre trust, which controls most halls in South Africa, refuses to let us any hall. The League's meetings have been broken up time and again by an organised black hundred, and the police has repeatedly instigated proceedings against our members for the crime of being assaulted by organised mobs.

In August 1916 a manifesto against the continuance of the War was the occasion for a police court charge. Two comrades were sentenced to six weeks hard labour. The sentence was quashed on appeal.

A Government Frame Up

In July 1918 three of our white comrades and five natives were arrested on a charge of Gewalt (violence). The League, which during the war had been the only propaganda body in South Africa, had become somewhat popular among the workers, especially among the native workers. The native had found in the League, for the first time in the history of South Africa, a working class organisation willing to fight for the native proletariat, assisting them in every way towards their emancipation.

The Industrial Workers of Africa, a native organisation on revolutionary lines, formed by the League, the outcome of the League's native study classes, began to instill in the minds of the authorities the fact, that it had been formed for the purpose to fight for the abolition of the present system.

A passive resistance movement, organised by the I. W. of A. in conjunction with South Africa native National Congress for the abolition of the pass system and for higher wages, was the occasion for the Government to try their hands at a frame up.

Elaborate preparations were made by the "Native Affairs" and "Secret Service" department to strike the blow, which was to exterminate the League. By means of cables to Britain and discussions in Parliament the Government started, six months prior to the arrest of our comrades, a campaign to prepare public opinion against the League.

Police spies were sent to the meetings of the I. W. of A. and classes of the League, instructed

to take notes of the proceedings. One spy even accepted secretaryship of the I. W. of A. After a very sensational and mysterious message from the Government to the people about the League and German gold, details, which were inexpedient in public interest to publish etc., arrest followed.

The chief witness for the Government, a native of our study class, apparently more impressed by our teachings than by the Government pay, confessed, after reading a long statement in court about the activities of the League, that the statement just read out by him was not his statement, nor had it been signed by him. This smashed the six months work of the Union Government, and after three months of silence the case was dismissed.

About The Black Proletariat.

At the Socialist Conference of South Africa Socialists held on August 5th. 1917, for the purpose of electing a delegate, to represent South Africa at the Stockholm Conference of 1917, was to be noted the first fruits of our propaganda against colour prejudice. The League's lead in the matter was recognised by the following bodies represented: The social Democratic Federation of Cape Town, South African Peace and Arbitration Society, the Jewish Socialist Society of Cape Town, Sailors Union, and other unconnected Socialists outside the League. An Indian delegate, com. Sigamoney represented the organization of the urban Indian Union, and a number of native workers, one of whom addressed the Conference on the native agrarian grievances. It would be hard for our European comrades to realise the significance of the Indian and native delegates sitting in a working class gathering in South Africa. The very fact of these black fellow workers voicing their class consciousness with us, lifted the conference to a high pitch of enthusiasm. So seditious, subversive of order and of constituted authority is it regarded to carry on working class propaganda among the native workers, that an administrative Council of the S. A. L. P. sitting below in one of the Trades Hall Committee rooms adjourned to a neighboring hotel, as a protest against whites and natives sitting in conference together!

We do not claim that these coloured delegates represented great masses of the black proletariat. We look upon them rather as the advanced guard of that mass in its struggle toward articulation: the very existence of that mass, voteless, voiceless and unorganised, makes all white election results insignificant as a test of power. We repeat that only a barometer of effort, not of votes, can entitle a South African delegate to be heard in the Council of the International. We think that our propaganda and its fruit among the native and Indian workers are of a mighty significance for the millions of the coloured proletariat, in all parts of the world, and a surety that the South African proletariat too, will unitedly tread the path of the working class International.

Since that Conference South Africa has seen three huge and two or three small native strikes, one against the pass law and for higher wages as previously mentioned in the report.

This movement developed out of a small wage-strike of natives working in the Johannesburg municipality. It being the first native strike, the police court inflicted some sentences on the natives on strike, which caused a fairly general movement among the natives. The feature of their struggle against the pass law was, that the natives simply collected the passes in big bags and burned them in front of pass offices and police stations.

In the Cape Town strike of January 1920, against the export of foodstuffs from the union, the natives were let down badly by the white workers notwithstanding the fact, that they had come out on strike on request of Cape Federation of Trades.

The third strike was of native mine workers, in March 1920. About forty thousand natives were involved daily, where one mine returned to work, another mine came on strike, thereby keeping the police on the run all the time.

The Transvaal strikes were all suppressed by violence on the part of the police and white mobs of hoodligans and the workers were driven back at the point of the bayonet. A large number of casualties were inflicted (injured and killed).

A Government inquiry held for the purpose of finding the causes of the native grievances, assured the public once more, that the working conditions of the natives did not warrant the unrest among them, but the doctrines of the I. S. I. and the example of white workers were the cause.

The natives are rapidly proving that they begin to understand what solidarity means. So far, the natives' spirit of revolt has meant so much steam in the air, as they do not possess the necessary organisation. But once that machinery could be created to control and direct that spirit they will prove an irresistible force.

Affiliation to the III International.

During the war the League has found its kind est spirit in the Zimmerwaldien group. It has corresponded and looked for inspiration, up to the Russian Revolution, more to the Italian Socialist Party and com. Grimm of Berne, than to even our English comrades, although the personnel of our E. C. is predominantly British.

At our Fifth Conference the League affiliated to the Third International.

The Industrial Movement of S. Africa

Like the political movement, the industrial movement suffered severely through the war.

It had just emerged from a last battle in January 1914 and had not had time yet to consolidate its forces, when the war broke out.

The first general strike, July 1913, a victory for the workers, had killed all race hatred existing between the Dutch and English workers, and indeed it seemed as if internationalism was going to be the basis of the South African trade union movement. But the war, once more awakened a bitter racial feeling between both races, and the already badly damaged forces of industrial organised labour, fell to pieces or nearly so.

Since its inception, the League had started

vigorous campaign for „Industrial Unionism.“ The workers had not been long in discovering that the capitalist class was undermining and weakening the workers' position, while the workers were disorganised through racial feelings. During 1916 and 1917 the South African Industrial Federation started a vigorous organising campaign in the Transvaal, with the result that today it is hard to find a white man in the Transvaal, who does not belong to one union or another.

The South African Industrial Federation consists of affiliated trade and craft unions. As its name indicates, previously it was called „The Federation of Trades,“ it was thought that with the existence of trades craft unions, the „Federation“ was to be the means to bring „Industrial Unionism“ about. But instead of that being so, the Federation discourages all revolutionary movements, or any tendency to revolutionise the fighting tactics of the workers.

So far the only move that is made towards industrial organisation, is by means of forming „Industrial Departments“ within the shell of the Federation, without touching or eliminating craft or trade unions between such Industrial Departments.

The industrial movement is more and more forced to adopt the League's methods of fighting and organisation. Three years ago the industrial movement did not give the native any consideration. The native was not simply in their mind as a worker, and any one preaching the organisation of the white unskilled, to say nothing of the organisation of the Bonta proletariat, was considered insane.

Today the native question receives due consideration, although nothing concrete has been done. The question is laid down before every trade union congress or delegates meeting of any kind and union branches. Considering this in the light of the position of three years ago, then indeed it can be regarded as a great advance towards the fulfillment of the League's principle of solidarity, irrespective of race or colour.

The League, in its propaganda for working class solidarity, does not neglect one race or another. The white worker with his petty bourgeois outlook on life is inseparable industrially from the native, therefore both races must advance together.

The Shop Steward Movement.

The Shop Steward movement in Great Britain was a spontaneous one, initiated by the rank and file of the trade unions in spite of the officialdom of these unions. In South Africa it was introduced by com. W. H. Andrews, the delegate to the Stockholm conference just returned from Britain. In his capacity of League organiser, he addressed a number of trade union branch meetings, aggregate meetings of trade unionists, together with a number of propaganda meetings under the auspices of the League, on the Shop Stewards movement.

This movement is more or less artificial in South Africa. Like in the trade union movement, the native is ignored, has no say or representation on the work committees, and for this reason has not developed into a revolutionary movement. Today

It is bound hand and foot to the Federation, the object of the Shop Steward movement has been lost.

Every effort on the part of the Shop Steward committee of a complete industrial concern, like mine, power station etc., to get their grievances adjusted by direct action, is condemned by the Federation, and the men concerned are branded as sectionalists. "We want" says the Federation, "united mass action of the proletariat," but good care is taken that such action never comes about, and if any crisis threatens to develop into mass action, it is always directed into joint boards and boards of reference and what not.

The Federation will not be anything else, but a petty bourgeois movement, until the native takes his place in the ranks of organised labour. While using revolutionary phrases, it assists the capitalists to exploit the labour power of the Bantu races, strengthening the whites' position on this exploitation.

In fact, the capitalist press, time after time, appeals to the white worker to come to some peaceful arrangement, by which all whites will be enabled to suck the life blood out of the native.

Revolutionary Action on the Part of the White Industrial Workers.

Two events of immense revolutionary effect on the workers' mind took place in South Africa. The formation of Johannesburg and Durban municipal Soviets. These events prove that the revolutionary instinct of the workers is ahead of their socialist knowledge.

The movement in Johannesburg developed out

of the wage action on the part of the Power Station Engineers. The refusal on the part of the Power Station's Engineers, and the refusal on the part of the Town Council to settle the matter led to the formation of the Soviet. On April 1 the engineers and tramway men disposed of the services of the town council, captured the Town Hall and resumed the tram, Power and lighting services of the Town under their own control. The first tram coming out, flying the red flag, bore out the victory of the Soviet, and 16 members of the Town Council resigned.

The Durban affair was better organised. There the workers had taken control of all the municipal offices and concerns.

In both Soviets the natives were ignored as usual. The strategy was excellent in both cases. They wisely reckoned, that as a permanent institution under capitalism the Soviet was impossible. After giving the rank and file a taste of their power and the unconditional surrender of both Councils, the Boards of Control or Soviets, withdrew. Such experiments can only be successful by forcing the whole proletariat to capture control first of political power.

A drop of water in a pump often makes the pump give water. But the revolutionary spirit throughout the country was not there yet. In both Soviets the workers' revolutionary discipline was splendid. Apart from the S. A. I. F. we have the Cape Federation of Trades and the Natal Federation of Trades and the National Union of Railway and Harbor Servants. The S. A. I. F. is the largest body; all the other organisations together have about an equal membership as the S. A. I. F.

