

the grave menace which threatens all State institutions of subjection to the domination of political groups.

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The claims asserted by Dr. Sugden on behalf of his profession are probably supported by practically every teacher who has any sense of the dignity of his work. But what applies in the case of the teacher also applies, in all essential respects, to all workers. Whether it is teaching or nursing, engine-driving or boot-making, the man who best understands the work is the man who is actually doing it. And precisely the same measure of autonomy which is claimed for the Professorial Board of a University, ought, in the name of democracy and the interests of efficiency, to be conceded to every union of manual workers. The impatience of bureaucratic interference which is so marked a characteristic of the best type of professional men, is perhaps just as common, and certainly as well founded, though less articulate, among the best type of workers of all kinds. Dr. Sugden's protest against the interference of State officials with the details of University teaching, has its exact counterpart in the recent quarrel between the workers of New South Wales and the Railway Commissioners. Unfortunately, University teachers and professional men are not, as a rule, consistent in their attitude to the State, and some of them are as ardent in opposing the rights of the worker as in defending their own rights. But the spirit of Prussianism is the same whether it manifests itself in the Education Department or the Railway Department. And as surely as it gains a foothold in one department of our national life, it will in time conquer the remaining territory. At whatever point the attack is made first, it ought to be resisted by all who realise the danger. University men may, if they please, regard the unions as merely the distant outposts, and the University as the central citadel of spiritual freedom. But once the outposts go, the citadel will not hold out long. The fight against the Prussianisation of our life is one in which, even if no higher principle were involved, no guild which wishes to retain its independence and self-respect can afford to be indifferent to the fate of its weaker brother.

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At the present moment the unions in Australia are engaged in a critical struggle against the domination of the State. But, if University professors preach, as some of them preach, with religious vehemence, the duty of unconditional surrender to the claims of the State, and if the University is allowed to become a recruiting ground for strike-breakers, by what right, and with what hope of success, will the University resist when its turn comes? Dr. Sugden rightly insists that the freedom of the University teacher is a matter which concerns not the teacher alone, but the whole community. Exactly the same thing is true of the freedom of the great body of workers. None of us can allow them to be degraded without degrading ourselves, or allow them to be attacked without inviting an attack upon ourselves. The unions which are now struggling for their existence are the protectors not only of a class, but of the very foundations of national efficiency and spiritual freedom.

THE NEW SOUTH WALES "STRIKE."

To form anything like a reasonable opinion on the real issues involved in the industrial upheaval in New South Wales, it is essential that a person interested in the subject should be acquainted with the general condition of the Government (State and Federal), public finances, and the growing power of the trades unions.

The Government of this State (as well as the Federal Government) had followed a policy of borrowing in outside markets at a heavy rate of interest for the construction of all public works. The railways and tramways are practically owned by persons resident outside of Australia.

Mining, shipping, sugar, banking and various other financial affairs in this country were largely in the hands of shareholders resident in other parts of the world. (It is well known that there were German shareholders in almost every large industry in this country when the war broke out, and that many of these shares are still the property of "enemy aliens," although nominally "covered" by Australian names.)

Twenty-five years of Labour organisation had produced a trades union power in this country, and on the political side had resulted in ten years of Labour Government in this State, and a return of Labour Governments in four other States, as well as the Federal Power.

It was frequently stated and largely accepted as a truism that, unless some better control of the labouring masses in Australia could be secured, it would be impossible to further develop this country according to commercial or capitalistic ideals.

Briefly, this seems to me a statement of conditions just preceding the outbreak of war. There was little alteration except a generally increased velocity of development along each direction after the war began until the Economic Conference (which Mr. W. M. Hughes attended) was held in Paris in March, 1916. Mr. Hughes was Prime Minister of Australia, but whether he attended that conference as a representative of Australia, and if so who authorised his attendance in that capacity has not been made public.

That Mr. Hughes did all that he could to force conscription on this country in October of 1916 is already history. Conscription was defeated.

An Imperial Conference was called to meet in London in March or April, 1917. The forcing of the Federal elections for March prevented Hughes, Irvine, and Forrest from leaving Australia to attend that conference, and the proceedings of the conference have never been made public. All that is known of the purposes of the conference is that it was to consider Imperial Defence, Imperial Tariff and Imperial Immigration. It was also authoritatively stated that the conference would have both advisory and administrative powers.

Between the election of the Nationalist Government in March and the date of the men going out on strike, 11,668 men had been put off of Govern-

ment works in the State of New South Wales alone. There were no new industries to absorb this labour. There was no shortage of labour in any privately-controlled industries already established. Side by side with this increase of unemployed, caused by the Government, was a steady increase in the cost of living.

The Railway men in New South Wales had refused to join in any of the demonstrations against the proposed introduction of conscription in this country. After the defeat of conscription, they formed and sent away a special battalion of men for transport service in France. After the election of the Nationalist Government, in March, the Railway men in the workshops signed an agreement with the Government to **continue the working conditions then in force until after the war.**

On the plea of ascertaining the cost of work, the Government introduced a new method of cards into the Railway workshops at Randwick on the 1st of June. The men protested. They objected to the appointment of numerous new "pannikin" (small) foremen, who held and filled cards which the men were not allowed to see. The trouble bubbled through June and July. On the 1st of August the Government extended its new card system to the Railway workshops at Everleigh. The men protested. An independent tribunal was asked for. The Government refused the request. The Government also refused to suspend the card system for any length of time whatever, and demanded that the men should go on working under it. The only concession (?) offered the restless men by the Government was that, if the system proved itself obnoxious, at the end of three months a tribunal to enquire into the matter should be appointed.

The Railway men came out on strike. The Tramway men came out in sympathy with the Railway men, and also to adjust some grievances of their own. Although every food storage place in the city of Sydney was filled to its uttermost capacity in the case of butter, meat, sugar and flour, and over 300,000 tons of coal were in reserve, unionists in all branches of industry were asked to violate one of the principles of unionism, and handle "black" goods carried by rail and sea, on trains and boats, manned by strike breakers.

By lurid appeals to the country people and false allegations of riot and looting in Sydney, the Government secured the services of (newspaper figures) 5000 strike-breakers—men. Women strike-breakers to the number of 4000 are also stated to have been secured. Hundreds of extra police were put on duty, and great crowds of special constables sworn in.

For six weeks the strike went on peacefully, calmly and hopefully. Every day saw some new body of men forced into inactivity by the Government's now declared policy of crushing out any opposition to its will. Union officials and crowds of lesser men were arrested for various charges ranging from "conspiracy" to the "use of insulting language." One strike-breaker (Wearne) shot dead a striker (Flannagan), and on a plea that he had been attacked was immediately released and allowed to continue in the Govern-

ment employment at the strike-breakers' camp. It was commonly reported that Grammar School boys, public school boys and University students, as well as numbers of clerks, whose firms had commandeered their services as strike-breakers,

But the great processions of strikers and the massed meetings in the Domain remained orderly. There was practically no drunkenness. How long could the women and children hold out?

At the end of six weeks the men, by a large majority, voted to continue the struggle. But the Defence Committee? They ordered the men back to work on the Tuesday morning of September 11. Many unions met on the Monday and refused, as unions, to obey the Defence Committee's mandate. But on the Tuesday many men presented themselves at their places of work and were asked to sign an application form containing a reference to the strike and a promise, if employed again, to be of good behaviour and go wherever they were sent. Many of the men refused to sign.

The Government figures claim that 7000 men signed the objectionable paper on the Tuesday morning, **but not one man was put on by the Government.** The men were told that their applications would be considered "in due course."

Since Tuesday (to-day is Saturday, September 15) numbers of men who signed the application papers have been notified that their services are no longer required, and advised to obtain work elsewhere.

The Government announces the successful formation of many new unions under the Government's recently enacted Industrial Act.

So much for the facts in the case.

If the Defence Committee knew that this was to be "the last fight," so far as the Government could make it so, was not the said Defence Committee wise in letting the men find out for themselves just how bitter the fight was to be **at the earliest possible moment?**

No just-minded person can doubt that, given that the case was as stated, the Defence Committee has done all in its power to show the Government the solidarity of the workers in this State—and to show the men the hellish intention of the Government.

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New South Wales.