

THE OPTIMISTIC NOTE

By J. T. MURPHY

MR. HODGES' speech at Blackpool struck what is known as the "optimistic note"! "It was not to be expected," he said, "that the working classes would completely escape the evil consequences of war." "I am not a pessimist," he told the delegates, "I am certain we shall come out of the present position within the next year."

Talk about faith and hope—but where are the facts and the reasons for the faith in him?

Facts and figures, ways and means, clear explanations of the international situation, these are not for conferences, controlled by Mr. Hodges and his "Erb."

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The delegates badly needed a lead. The miners' agreement of 1921 was one of the most vicious documents ever put into practice. It has broken them into factions and fastened them to a kind of profit-sharing scheme, which is being handled by Mr. Hodges and his colleagues in the most reactionary fashion. His colleagues don't always understand. But Hodges understands. He knows quite well that 'refusing international solidarity on this issue and standing for a narrow British unionism he is turning the M.F.G.B. into an international 'scab' organisation.

We are confident that once the rank-and-file of the miners see this it is all up with Mr. Hodges and his policy.

Some Facts

Within the last few months coal has poured into Northern France at cheap rates, driven the French miners on to the streets and set the pace for attacks on wages and hours of labour in all European coal producing countries. Of America we shall speak later. But in this crisis the miners have either to force the pace against the Hodges' policy and insist upon an international solution, or be used in turn with the miners of other countries to defeat each other.

This is the real prospect supported by facts which do not strike an "optimistic note."—

"Coal Crisis in France.—British unscreened costs 28s. or francs 73 the ton. French unscreened costs francs 75 the ton. British screened costs francs 95. A year ago no English coal was being imported into France, but the cut in the British miners' wages now enables English coal to enter into serious competition with French coal. . . . British coal is being imported in ever increasing quantities. . . . In the North there has been no reduction (in wages) and it is difficult to see how any effective 'reduction can be made, since the cost of living has not fallen in the least. Several mines in the North have already closed down, as the owners could not make further cuts in prices or any reductions in wages."

7th April, 1922. M. Darcy, Chairman of French Coal Owners' Committee in his Annual Report for 1921:—

"France is swamped with foreign coal in the West and the East. . . . The French colliery owners have struggled hard against the crisis. They have lowered their costs of production by cutting down wages, and reduced their sale prices to consumers. But all these measures have not been able to counteract the evil results due to the 8-hour day."

5th May, 1922:—

"Strike movement in Belgium, notably among. . . . the coal-miners. The object of the movement is to protest against the reduction of wages."

This quotation from the "Compendium" (May) is to the like effect:—

"Coal Mining Trouble in Spain.—The employers have notified their men of the decision stating that it is impossible to compete with foreign traders unless wages are reduced the only alternative being to close their mines and factories. . . . the cost of living continues to increase."

Can there be any solution apart from international workers' action?

The International Conference

There is to be an International Conference at Frankfort next month and, added Mr. Smith, in response to the American miners' delegates: "a statement would be made of the kind that would be appreciated—that the mines should be for the nation and not for the millionaires. A statement which will please you"!!!

When will the cackle cease and the miners' leaders get down to the task of helping the miners now to resist further degradation? That is the question every miner should be asking.

Equally fatuous was Mr. Hodges' approach to the question of the R.I.L.U.

Misrepresentation seems to be Mr. Hodges' principal weapon. Not once has he faced up to the task of answering the case against the Amsterdam International, by an examination of its composition, its principles and its history.

Who is doing the Splitting?

He says that we split the French Trade Union movement.

It is true that the French Trade Union movement was split, but the full responsibility for that rests on the shoulders of the Amsterdam International.

So long as we were in the minority there was no split. As soon as we won a majority to our side then the minority, who were now the Amsterdam crowd expelled the majority, in spite of all the appeals of the Red International against the splitting tactics.

Hodges' statement with regard to the activity of Amsterdam during the Russian Polish war is equally misleading.

He says: "It (Amsterdam) was the only organisation in Europe that effectively prevented munitions going into Poland. . . ."

Here they are at it again, claiming credit for the actions of the masses inspired by the Revolutionaries, which forced the leaders of Amsterdam to make a call. The sincerity of their call and how anxious they were to assist Russia, was shown at the Rome Congress this year, when the Polish Trades Union delegate took the E.C. to task on this very incident, Finnes, the secretary of the Amsterdam International, declared that the blow was not aimed at Poland but at Allied Imperialism and they would have stopped munitions going to Russia also, if that had been possible. (See Labour Mag., June.)

Amsterdam Impudence

Again he claims the Amsterdam International helped the miners in the lock-out, but on his own showing demonstrated the ramshackle character of the Amsterdam International. The Dutch and Belgian organisations started sympathetic action, but were let down by the French Trades Unions. But where was the International? What call did it give for sympathetic action? Everyone knew that the fight was coming and at the International Miners' Conference preceding the lock-out, the leader of the German miners warned the whole conference that great stocks of coal were accumulating in Germany for the purpose of use against other mine workers.

Even the miners' International did not meet during the lock-out, nor did the Amsterdam International harness the Transport Workers to refuse to transport the coal. And don't forget 1,500,000 tons, is no small amount to trickle in during a miners' lock-out.

The facts are against you, Mr. Hodges and against the Amsterdam International. Your reply to Cook and Davis was an evasion of the issue and a dirty one at that.

The vote on the issue, Red International versus Amsterdam, was not so much a defeat of the Red International as a warning to the Hodges' and their kind that the days of their 'leadership' are numbered.

The "optimistic note" is false. The succeeding conference of the Miners' Federation will prove our contention.