Betrayed by British Labour.

RAND STRIKE PRISONERS REPUDIATED BY RAMSAY MACDONALD'S PUSH.
A CALL TO REPENTANCE FROM THE C.P.S.A.

The British Labour Party has once more shown itself to be dominated by the psychology of trade union officials, middle-class "intellectuals," pacifists, etc., rather than of the proletarian rank and file, who have always shown appreciation of the fight put up by Rand strikers. Nor is the South African Labour Party free from blame in this matter. It was expected of them that they would at least have pressed publicly for the 38 prisoners' release before Parliament rose; but they seem to have been silent. Do they agree with the British Labour Party's slam of the door? WE INVITE THEIR PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT OF THE FOLLOWING "LETTER FOR HOME" which left by this week's mail, and which may perhaps contribute to a victory in that Party's councils of the militants who are blaming Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, the apparent admirer of Fascism, who talks of "the end of Marxism" and sneers at "foreign inspiration" in English Socialism, for "killing the enthusiasm of the workers for the Labour movement" . . .

The Executive of the
British Labour Party,
33, Eccleston Square,
London, S.W.1 2nd July, 1923.

Fellow-Workers,

With indignation, but without surprise in view of the attitude previously taken up by your party in the matter, the class-conscious workers of South Africa, in whose name we are confident we speak in this connection, read the cabled news of the rejection by your recent Party Congress of a motion for a campaign for the release of the Rand strikers, thirty-eight of whom, including some of the finest types of proletarian militants, are still in prison serving sentences of from a year to lifelong servitude, while their families are living in distress despite great efforts locally to support them.

We cannot but contrast this apparently deliberate boycott not only with the sympathy of the Communist International and its affiliated parties but also with the interest shown, we believe, by your party itself in the case of the "class-war prisoners" in similar plight in America, to say nothing of certain Barabbases in Soviet Russia.

An uncharitable explanation, supported perhaps by the attitude of the recent Hamburg Conference, is that you still consider it more important to oppose the Communists (who according to Government reports which you perhaps accept were behind the Rand upheaval) than the capitalist class against which our imprisoned fellow-workers were unquestionably engaged. As a matter of fact, there were more members of the South African Labour Party (with which you are no doubt in fraternal relation) than of the Communist Party involved in all phases of the strike and "revolt," and there are at least as many now in gaol, while the great majority concerned belonged to neither but to the Dutch Nationalist Party, or none at all. You are hurting the workers in general, but not the Communists in particular, by rejecting the resolution.

We remember the plea being put up many months ago that more information was required before the Labour Party could commit itself to support of the cause of these strike victims. There has been ample time since then for your party to have obtained all the facts. Have you asked the South African Labour Party for a report all this time? We are sure you have not. Have you even studied the report, admirable considering that it was based almost entirely on capitalist sources, of your Labour Research Department, drawn up as long ago as April, 1922? Did you ever consult the "Class War Prisoners' Release Committee" of London, which was actively agitating on behalf of our prisoners during most of last year, and at whose instance numbers of resolutions were passed by trade unions, etc., and copies forwarded to your Party? Did not these resolutions at least put you on enquiry? Did not the news of the execution of four strikers, and of the national storm of indignation thereat in South Africa, disturb your complacency?

Perhaps you have regarded the Rand strike of 1922 as opposed to the interests of the native workers. Again it would have been wiser to take the opinion on this point of representative working class bodies here, both black and white, instead of swallowing Smuts' propaganda, calculated to delude the native worker, as well as the foreign observer, into the belief that the strike was directed against the native slaves and not against the masters of black and white workers alike. It may be mentioned that native associations were among those who protested against the execution even of a striker convicted of shooting a native. In any case, you will surely agree that a fight to maintain a skilled workers' standard of wages (which this strike was in essence) operates at least indirectly for the benefit of all ranks of workers; and our native workers' standard has certainly not improved as the result of the defeat of the white workers, although it is true that a number of jobs previously held by whites are now performed by coloured men at a much lower wage that is what the "abolition of the colour bar" comes to. It is a procedure no more defensible because there is a difference of colour involved than it would be in, say, England.

Or again, are you still under the delusion that Smuts, the "democrat," is a friend of the working class after what you know of his treatment of white and black indifferently in (to go no further back) the Rand strikes of 1913 and 1914, the native strikes of 1918 and 1919, the Village Deep, Port Elizabeth and Bulhoek affairs and the Bondelswart campaign where, as here last year, women and children were bombed from the air?

At one time another point was raised on behalf, we believe, of your party that South Africa being a "self-governing" country, any outside "interference" was inadmissible. This ground is obviously no longer tenable in view of the recent agitation, in which your party was also involved; against the "persecution" of priests in Russia.

Seven months ago the Communist Party of South Africa cabled to Mr. Walton Newbold, M.P., urging him to bring pressure to bear in Britain to save the lives of a number of the same prisoners, then condemned to death. Feeling the necessity of support, Mr. Newbold enlisted the interest of some members of your party; but for your party's official support he felt it was useless to appeal, and events seem to have borne out his judgment.

Meanwhile our fellow-workers are still in prison. The agitation for their release continues. We would urge that the rejection of the Barrow resolution at your Congress does not prevent you from still assisting that agitation.

May we suggest that even at this late stage you should obtain from the S.A. Labour Party a report (which should be published here at the same time that it is despatched to you) on the propriety of the agitation. We believe that the effect of such a report, if honestly drawn up, would be that you would no longer remain indifferent, but would do your utmost to repair the injury your Congress has done to the cause of the imprisoned men. One opportunity will occur during the forthcoming visit of General Smuts to the Imperial Conference. We would urge that you should not only force the matter of the release upon the attention of that capitalist body but should simultaneously organise working class demonstrations, equal to those that protested against the South African deportations of 1914, throughout the British Isles, and thus help to remove the world-wide impression that the British Labour Party, or at least its ruling element, deserves the reproach which according to our cables has recently been made against it by the Communist International, that it is "one of the greatest props of British Imperialism."

For the defeat of Capitalism,
The Communist Party (South Africa),
SIDNEY P. BUNTING,
Secretary.