

EAST LONDON IN WAR TIME.

By MELVINA WALKER.

Recruiting in the Dock Road.

When War was declared everybody who was "anybody" in Poplar threw himself or herself into the job of recruiting. I happen to live in the East India Dock Road, two doors from the Recruiting Office. A better spot for that office could not have been chosen; for the Dock Road was, and is to-day, the parade ground of the unemployed.

All kinds of people could be seen in and out of the recruiting office. Of course there were the parsons, landlords and house agents, for these are the people who know the unemployed; there were also the factory owners and publicans who are in touch with the men at work. Down came three or four 'buses filled with soldiers, and bands playing: "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," "Rule Britannia" and other such songs to stir up the people. Each 'bus displayed a white banner inscribed: "Roll Up Boys, A Free Ride to Berlin."

Hundreds of men and women gathered round. Every man who walked up the steps to "sign on" was treated as a hero; cheers were continually rising.

Some of the "heroes" did not relish the idea of fighting. I saw one well known slum landlord patting a recruit on the back and crying: "Come on now! Don't you think your country worth fighting for? You'll be in Berlin in less than a month! Think of your wife and children if the Germans get here! The Kaiser vows he will eat his dinner on Christmas Day in Buckingham Palace!"

That same recruited comrade had been glad to go to the Guardians to get food for his children when we were fighting Lord Devenport during the great Dock strike!

The Dock Gates is a spot that has become sacred to socialist meetings. Over and over again the workers have been told from that pitch that they have no country. Sir Alfred Yeo, a Poplar man, well known and trusted, and one who has obtained his position and title by exploiting Poplar workers, now came down to the Dock Gates to ask them to go to to fight for King and country. Socialists shouted out that the country was not worth fighting for; but Yeo replied: "When you return you will all get your jobs back, and we shall see that this is made a country fit for heroes to live in."

The War is over now: we have gone back to the old ways in spite of the thousands of Poplar men who made the supreme sacrifice: the Dock Road is again the parade ground of the unemployed.

The Sugar Shortage.

We Poplar women were soon faced with rising prices and a shortage of many commodities, especially sugar. We could not understand why sugar was lacking, for the dockers were telling us that there were tons of sugar in the dock warehouses. Yet we were obliged to line up outside the shops for hours to get any.

With Runciman at the Board of Trade.

Women of the W.S.F. demanded to see Mr. Runciman, then President of the Board of Trade, to ask why sugar was being held up in East London although there was plenty to be had in the West End.

The day before going to see Runciman I went over the dock warehouses with a comrade who works there. He told me he thought there was enough sugar in the country to last two years, and showed me great galvanized sheds full of sugar and cereals, which had lately been built. I knew, when I saw them, that the Government had been preparing for the War; but next day, when thirteen of us were at the Board of Trade, Mr. Runciman declared there was a great shortage

and that the Government was very sorry: "but you see," he assured us, "all this has come on us so suddenly; the war has found us unprepared. We have raised the price of sugar so that people will use less. You know that when a commodity goes up in price people become more careful in using it." He thought we should be easily talked over; we were so ignorant! But he was wrong.

told us many terrible things that they had suffered at the hands of the Tzar's Government. She could not understand why English working women believed in the War.

The Margarine Queues.

Then came the margarine shortage and the air raids, Margarine went up to a 1/- per pound.



Keir Hardie and Jaures who warned the Workers against the World Capitalist War.

We clamoured to know how he dared tell us that when our husbands were unloading and storing large quantities of sugar. We demanded that the sugar should be rationed and that the workers should get an equal share of it. But he would not entertain that idea!

The Potatoe Shortage.

Then came the potatoe shortage. The price went up to 6d. per pound, and even at that price we could not get potatoes. We shall never forget that, and we shall always remember how the farmers robbed our little children. Women in the East End who have large families make stew with "dough-boys" and potatoes every day. During the shortage, one could hear the tramp and clatter of women hurrying past at five o'clock in the morning. They had heard that a certain shop had got potatoes and was going to open at nine, and they found it necessary to line up outside before six because they had learnt by experience that even if they came even a little later the potatoes were sold out before their turn was reached. So the women hurried out with their market bags before day-break, leaving the children and young babies behind, and we constantly heard of children being absent from school, and children being scalded or burnt whilst their mother was waiting in the queue.

Once, when I had gone five weeks without potatoes, one of my neighbours told me she knew where we could buy some. We went together at six in the morning to a filthy slum in Shadwell. I remember going down a long, narrow passage into a room where some little children were sleeping. Concealed under their beds were sacks of potatoes, and whilst the children were sleeping, the mother was weighing potatoes, and charging 6d. a pound for them.

She was a beautiful woman: a Russian Jewess. I spoke to her of the hard times we were having. She said: "I know no other times. It was always hard in Russia. My husband was imprisoned in Siberia. He escaped and we had to fly." She

But when we protested in the queues, some women said we must be contented, and thank God that we got any food at all.

How many propaganda meetings I held in those queues? I remember lining up one morning when the conversation turned on Queen Alexandra coming to East London the day before.

"I had such a good view of her," said one woman, "her carriage stopped right alongside of me, and I can tell you she looked handsome; such a sweet smile on her face, and beautifully dressed, not flash, but neat, and her carriage and her servants all very handsome."

I turned to the woman: "Yes, she would look handsome lining up for hours in this slosh like us. She hasn't got to line up!"

"Well you wouldn't expect her to, would you?" "I thought we all had to suffer alike during the War, and that we all had to make equal sacrifices. What sacrifices are she and her sort making?"

"None!" said another woman. "It's always the poor that suffer. It always has been and always will be."

Another woman began to chime in:

"I never knew anything about her coming; they never had no flags out. They always have flags out when Royalty comes down."

"Yes, but things are different now," said another. "They keep it quiet, see; because they say there's a lot of spies all around here, because of the Docks."

"Ain't you heard of them signalling to the Germans when there's a raid on?"

"And do you know there's spies going round in the docks and workshops stirring up trouble and getting the men to strike, so as we won't win the war? It's in the papers."

"Yes, my old man won't believe me when I tell him about it; he says it ain't true. But them Germans is wicked enough for anything."

"They ought to be all interned."

"I should intern everyone with a German name; once a German, always a German!"

"One woman protested: 'Some of them with German names has been born in this country: if you are born here you ain't German.'"

"No, but you have German blood; it's the blood that counts. German blood is bad."

"Would you have the heart to go bombing the German women and children like the Germans do here? Do you call that fighting fair?"

"But we do it."

"They started it!"

"The King's got a German name; would you intern him?"

"I don't believe in Royalty; we shall always have wars while we have a King; this is nothing but a family quarrel—"

But then came an air-raid signal. We darted off like foxes scurrying to their holes.

The Air Raids.

How we suffered during the air raids! We shall always remember the daylight raid when one of our Poplar schools was bombed whilst the children were at their lessons. We saw the lifeless little bodies carried to the mortuary. How women suffered! The teachers in that school never lost their presence of mind, and immediately administered first-aid to the injured children.

Women were lining up in the queues all day and sheltering in the "dug-outs" every night. I used to see crowds of women going past my window carrying their babies' rugs and cushions to the Blackwall Tunnel, where they stayed from dark till daylight. Night after night the Tunnel was crowded. I have heard of children being born there. Hundreds of people died of cold; hundreds died of fright.

When we were squeezing our way into the Tunnel, we often had to make way for huge covered lorries whose drivers insisted on bringing them there for shelter. We used to complain that it was dangerous to bring them in, for even in the Tunnel we could hear the booming of the guns, and if the great horses should take fright, hundreds of people would be killed. I have since been told that those lorries were filled with high explosives waiting for shipment, and that as soon as the air-raid signals were given they were driven away to the Tunnel, the only safe place. Little did we know what risks were beside us in the Tunnel!

Then there was the terrible Silvertown explosion in which a great number of people lost their lives, many more being rendered homeless by the destruction of several streets of working-class houses.

The Worshippers of the Golden Calf.

All this time millions of working men were being blown to pieces in the war, in order that the few rich might become richer; whilst from hundreds of pulpits in and around East London, men calling themselves followers of the Prince of Peace, were preaching the "Knock-out Blow!" Those Worshippers of the Golden Calf, who in peace had been busy telling my class that it was the will of God that we should suffer and be patient, now told us that God was calling us to sacrifice our souls on the altar of our country. As Keir Hardie once said: "The patient endurance of the poor is due to ignorance of what is theirs by right."

A Hero of the Wars.

He couldn't fight the clever Huns in France;
They forced him to his knees and broke his lance.
Therefore, the Politicians called him home
To cool his poor, spurred heels and scheme and foam,

And spin a funny yarn of fairy snipers
And battles lost that made him clown of Ypres.
But when at last the Prime Ass did determine
To exterminate the wretched emerald vermine,
He sent him to the unregenerate isle,
His honour to redeem in English style.
There is no rival now eager to rob
This hero of the English ruling classes,
Who failed in France, of his notorious job
Of shooting down defenceless Irish masses.

HUGH HOPE.

THE MINERS' PROGRESS.

Five Years in the South Wales Coalfields.

By a Labour College Student.

CAUSE FOR OPTIMISM.

When one looks back over the last half-dozen years or so, one finds it difficult to visualise adequately the extent of the progress that has been made in the psychology of the South Wales miner. After one has been dipping into the realms of past human social development, which extend over such a long period, compared to an individual's life, or the life of any one social system, which is but a short period compared with general biological evolution—after jerking one's head from contemplation in which a thousand years are an immensely trifling fraction of time in the evolution of life, and glancing at the changes in outlook and economic structure which have characterised the mining industry during recent years, one cannot but marvel and become exuberantly enthusiastic and optimistic.

It is impossible within the compass of a short article to describe in detail the progress which has been made. It is only possible to make a rough survey and to show briefly some of the respects in which the miners' attitude towards conception of their industry and society in general is rapidly changing.

THE CAMBRIAN STRIKE OF 1911 AND THE MINIMUM WAGE STRIKE OF 1912.

When the Cambrian Combine strike of 1911 and the Minimum Wage strike of 1912 took place, the revolutionary centres in South Wales were very few in number and constituted rare oasis in the then barren desert of industry.

The miners' next step, emanating principally from the Rhondda, which at that time alone manifested any revolutionary fervour, was an attempt to arouse the rest of the coalfield into activity, and to frame a programme which would be in harmony with economic revolution.

THE SENTIMENTAL REVISIONIST PERIOD.

At that time the ignorance of the miner of his historic duty as a member of the working-class, and his historically-determined relation to the present system of society, was very prevalent. The opposition that existed to the Capitalist nature of coal production focussed itself mainly within the T.S.P. and received its stimulus largely from sentimental objections to Capitalism than from a clear view of the economic complications of Capitalism. Classes on Marxian Labour College lines were generally very few in number and embraced but a very small section of the miners. The bulk of the literature sold to and by Socialists was revisionist in character.

UNCONSCIOUS GUERRILLA WARFARE: THE "HAND TO MOUTH" POLICY.

The disputes that occurred between the employers and the workmen arose out of the temporary difficulties that cropped up, and were conducted generally without regard to the rest of the coalfield and to the future, and represented a "hand-to-mouth" policy.

The realisation that the desirability of fighting the coal-owner at a particular colliery on a certain issue and the manner of conducting the fight should be considered only in relation to the rest of the coalfield, and to its effects upon present and future progress of the miners' organisation was held in but few quarters. In other words, it was at this period but weakly realised that all grievances pressing upon particular workers emanate from the class ownership and control of production and exchange, and can only be successfully met by organised mass action, where in each branch of working-class activity

must be considered in relation to every other section of working-class activity, and wherein the interests of a portion of the working-class must not interfere with the generality of working-class interests.

The great mass of miners, while sympathising with each other in the separate struggles with the coal-owners, did not conceive that all these struggles are the expression of the same economic urge, of the same class need to which historical evolution had given birth. They did not conceive of these guerilla and apparently isolated and disconnected attacks upon the industry as being symptoms of the travail that the historical forces are undergoing in their delivery of a new society, and that they were, and are, linked together with economic threads that appear more visible every day.

GROWTH OF MASS CONSCIOUSNESS.

During the last few years the old parochial and narrow conception of working-class activity has nearly disappeared, and the miners are beginning to realise the nature of the mission that the developing productive forces have entrusted to them. The miners derive their importance from the importance in the economic life of society of the commodity, coal, which they produce. They are now realising that their great power must be used to benefit the workers, not only in respect to wages and hours, but also to improve the social conditions under which they live. To-day, the local Miners' Lodge is a social force in the neighbourhood.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES OF THE MINERS' FEDERATION.

Questions relating to rent, housing accommodation, local profiteering in food, clothing, etc.; in short, all the circumstances of the miners' social life, in addition to those purely economic and those exclusively pertaining to the mining organisation and industry, are discussed at Lodge meetings, and policies are there framed to meet the given situations. Practically all the Lodges in South Wales are continually and threateningly drawing the attention of the municipalities to the shortage of houses, etc. In fact, the local Miners' Lodge is no longer merely an instrument for dealing with the economic grievances of a particular economic association of wage-earners, but is now a very powerful social organisation in its district. Of course, its predominating power in comparison with other industries in the various districts is due to the fact that the mining industry in South Wales engages in most districts the majority of the workers.

ALL-EMBRACING CHARACTER OF THE ORGANISATION.

Some idea of the progress made by the S.W.M.F. during the last few years is to be got by noticing the complete disappearance of non-unionism in the industry. At the present moment we can say that practically every man in the industry in South Wales is organised. Moreover, the S.W.M.F. embraces, with some few exceptions which must speedily disappear, the whole of these men. Thus are present some of the conditions which are necessarily required for the control of the industry by the miners.

It is interesting to note that during the war a very important change took place regarding the basis of wages. Up to and including 1916, wages fluctuated according to the selling price of coal; an increase of wages could only be granted if the selling price, in relation to the cost of production permitted it. In 1917, however, war bonuses were won by the miners on the ground of the increased cost of living, and from then up to the present time the selling price of coal as a determining factor of wages has been replaced by the standard of life desired

by the miner. Of course the high prices, when present, will be used to justify increases of wages; but for the future the miners are not going to permit the fluctuations in coal prices to hinder their attempts to raise their standard of life.

WIDER HORIZONS.

What perhaps is one of the most noteworthy and gratifying features of the last few years, is the pronounced tendency—to which reference has been made in its local aspect—to widen the horizon of the miners' organisation, and to go farther than the mere improvement, or maintenance of wages, hours, etc. To-day the miner is determined to gain complete control over the conditions under which he works, and is urging the worker in all other industries to do likewise. The official nationalisation scheme

gifts, not in the degree and manner determined by the present ruling class, but in a manner and degree determined by themselves.

MINERS DEFY MUNITIONS ACT.

It was this spirit of self-reliance and resistance to domination that animated the miners in 1915, when, as a result of their coming out on strike for the purpose of securing better terms in the new Wage Agreement, the Government proclaimed the South Wales area under the Munitions Act and thereby made each miner liable to a fine of £5 for every day he was absent from work. This attitude of the Government made the position worse from their point of view, for the miners stiffened their backs and in a determined manner declared their intention to resist the claim of the Government to completely dominate their actions. As we all know,

out the war the South Wales miners endeavoured to protect themselves and the rest of the workers from the encroachment of the capitalists who tried to exploit the situation created by the war. Supplies of men for military and naval purposes were very grudgingly given, and the Government had reason to fear the resistance which South Wales miners put up against the demands for human munitions of war. Every effort was made to secure for soldiers increased pay, both for themselves and their dependents.

COMPENSATION FOR THE INJURED.

Perhaps one of the questions of which the miners have least reason to be proud is the position of the injured miner receiving compensation; 25/- a week is still the maximum sum that an injured miner completely divorced from his employment, can receive, whilst the miner on light employment gets very little more. This is one of the question which deserves the attention of every miner, and on which a fight should be put up. It is really impossible for any man receiving compensation pay to subsist without recourse to his friends or relatives. And no miner can afford to shirk the question, for no one knows who is going to be the next victim, no one is absolutely immune from accident.

INCOME TAX.

During the later half of last year the miners led the way in a fight against the payment of Income Tax upon wages, and if the movement had not been "spiked" by the leaders a vital blow would have been struck at the very roots of Government. It has been too often a feature of the last few years that one of the obstacles to working-class progress in South Wales has been the policy of the leaders. However the fight has not been averted, it has only been postponed.

MARXIAN CLASSES.

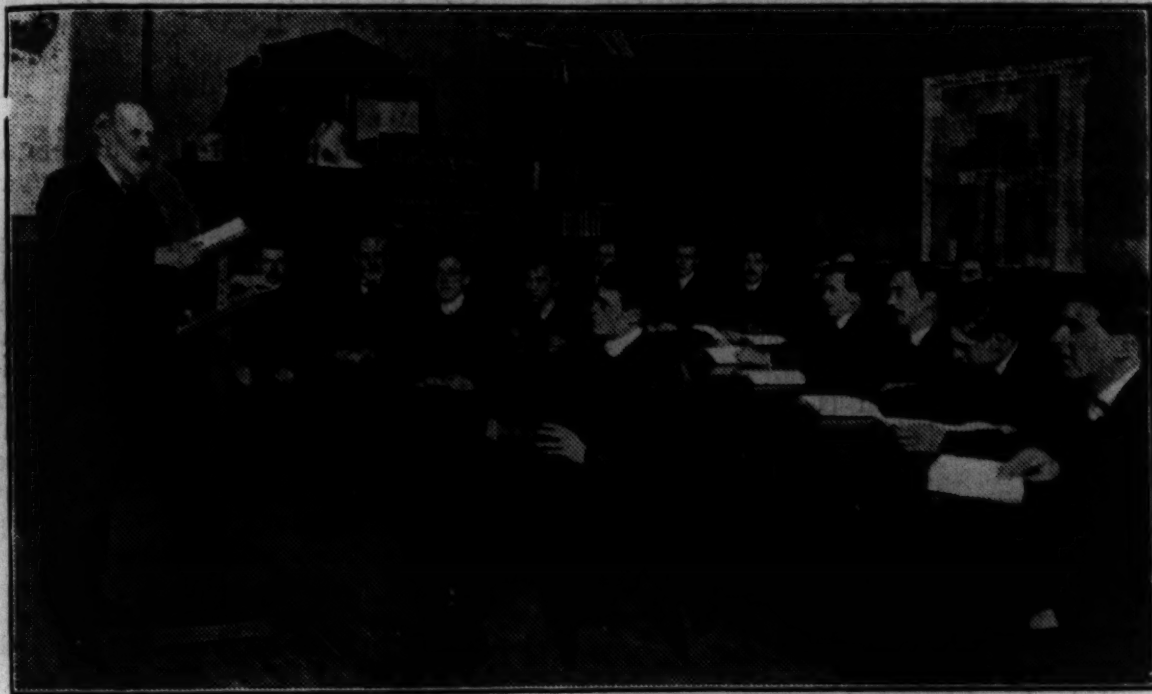
The most remarkable and pleasing characteristic of the last few years is the large number of classes which have sprung up throughout South Wales. To-day the need is for teachers, and when more of these are forthcoming, the number of classes will further increase. In nearly every mining district there is a band of young men eager to gain some knowledge of the laws of past human social development, so as to foresee whither this society is tending, and to harmonise their local activities with the inherent forces of economic evolution. The Welsh Commission into the Causes of Industrial Unrest (1917) paid a tribute to the influence which these small bands of earnest young men who were conscious of what they wanted and how to achieve it, can and do wield in the coalfield. Economic evolution is propelling society forward, and the people who realise the futility of opposing its progress have much the best opportunity of making use of it. These classes are creating the psychology whereby the future activities of the miners will not be conditioned by sentiment, or vague rebellion against the social injustices that hurt them. The men who have passed through the classes will be guided by scientific knowledge, and a realisation of the laws that cause social systems to come and go; and in consequence their activities will be much more effective.

EFFECT OF THE SHORTER WORKING DAY.

The classes are responsible for the distribution of large quantities of Marxian literature, the full effect of which cannot be overestimated and will fructify in a visible manner in the course of time. The reduction of working hours from 8 to 7 is enabling the miner to utilise more time for the problems that face and drive him to action. Incidentally, it will also necessitate the expenditure of a larger sum of money during the increased leisure time, and thus raise the standard of living, and make further inroads upon mineowners' profits.

MINERS' GROWING CONTROL OVER THE INDUSTRY.

Whether the official scheme for nationalisation and joint control is granted or not, the South Wales miners are going on quietly with the work of taking control. Some day, when the Government at last enacts some scheme of joint control, it will wake up to find that it is



A Class at the Labour College.

and campaign is the official recognition of this fact. The average miner, and not only the advanced section, resents the patronising and condescending character of the attempts of the ruling class to improve his conditions; attempts which they realise are only made to ensure the safety of the profits of capitalist production.

BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY REJECTED.

A week or so ago the writer attended a meeting at a vestry attached to a fashionable West End Church where a Labour College student addressed a "bourgeois" audience on "Nationalisation and the Miners' Point of View." It was amazing to see how completely these people failed to grasp the point of view of the South Wales miner. They thought that if they showed their appreciation of the arduous and hazardous nature of the miner's occupation, by increasing his wages, if possible, and by giving him a better house to live in, all would be done that was necessary. At the conclusion of the meeting a lady told the writer that very frequently she read to her son portions of a well-known encyclopedia describing the cost in life and limb at which coal was procured. She gushingly added that she emphasised to her son the need for being very grateful to the miners, and to see to it that in return they should have a nice house to live in and the opportunity to obtain a farm allotment.

The attitude of these people toward the miner is very much like that which they display to their pet dogs. They cannot imagine that the worker would still be dissatisfied with his commodity status, even if he were given plenty to eat and drink and clothing and shelter in abundance. They cannot understand that the worker intends to leave his position at the leg of the table where the dog usually remains, and is determined to have a place on the table and a voice in its arrangement. These people have had a monopoly of education; of the means of cultivating and satisfying esthetic tastes; and of the arrangements by which the present social relations are maintained. They have had such a monopoly of the culture (in the best sense of the term) that social development has ushered in, that they cannot realise that the workers are going to see that they share in these social

the Government were compelled to withdraw the proclamation, and the miners thus vindicated their right to at least some control over the expenditure of their labour-power.

THE EQUALISATION OF WAGES.

In the wage agreement that was then arrived at, the wages of the lower-paid miners were raised, and the disparity between the higher and the lower-paid men was reduced. Not many years ago the argument that the lower paid and semi-skilled miner should receive a wage sufficient to enable him to maintain his family at a social standard equal to that needed by the higher-paid man and his family, would have met with unanimous dissent. To-day—even more so than in 1915, when a partial application of this principle was effected—the mass of the miners are converted in the main to this point of view. Some progress, however, has still to be made in order to get a uniform wage for all grades of miners. Improvements were also made by this Agreement of the wages and working conditions.

THE ABOLITION OF CAPITALISM HAS BECOME THE OFFICIAL OBJECT OF THE S.W.M.F.

Another feature which has characterised the progress made during the period under review, and of which a miner may well be proud, is the inclusion in the Rules of the S.W.M.F. of the abolition of capitalism as part of the objects of the Federation. Probably there is no other powerful Union in the country, the constitution of which is so revolutionary. And the inclusion of this programme in the rules is by no means mere window-dressing. Nearly all the activities of the miners' organisation are influenced by the degree to which they bring the overthrow of capitalism nearer. The fight of last year, which resulted in the setting up of the Coal Industry Commission, was inaugurated by the advanced section of the miners, in order to help forward the materialisation of this object, and all future activities and demands will be animated by the same desire.

At the outbreak of war the S.W.M.F. Executive sounded the proletarian attitude to capitalist war, and definitely declared opposition to the conflict that was then impending. Through-

only legalising what already exist in practice. At the present moment the miners are necessarily exercising much control over important question of safety, employment, and dismissal of workmen, overtime, method of working, efficiency of officials, and supplies of means of production. Victimisation, which was once a very frequent and brutal practice of the coal-owners, has been fought and, at least in its naked character, thrown aside.

The psychology of the miners is now such that they are determined completely to dominate and control the forces and machinery that enter so largely into their lives. Last year a portion of the rank and file published a pamphlet setting forth in detail, to a degree not hitherto done, the machinery by which miners must control and manage coal production.* No one should fail to get this pamphlet. No words are wasted therein to show the right of the worker to control his industry. That is taken for granted. This fact alone is sufficient to show the change of outlook which the miner has undergone.

RANK AND FILE REJECT BUREAUCRATIC NATIONALISATION.

Nearly every miner to-day believes in his right to decide the character of the conditions under which he works. It is because the official scheme is garbed in bureaucratic attire; that it does not permit complete control from the bottom, but permits the higher hierarchy to determine the powers of the lower tiers, it is because of this that the miners show no enthusiasm over it. The rank and file pamphlet demands control from the bottom, and decentralises the industry, as far as the general interests of the community will allow. It assumes that the miner should not have democracy *made for him*, but that he must *make it himself*.

Whatever becomes of the official scheme; economic progress in the industry must eventually bring into materialisation the broad principles of this rank and file scheme.

GROWTH OF ATTENDANCE AT LODGE MEETINGS.

A very welcome sign of progress during the last few years is the increasing number of people who take interest in Trade Union questions, and attend the Lodge meetings. The capitalist Press have often been urging the miners to attend their Lodge meetings in order to subvert the policies of the so-called extremists, not understanding that the latter stand to gain from increased attendance, and are never tired of exhorting the miners to attend their Lodge meetings. It can safely be said that the most revolutionary mining centres are those in which the largest percentage of members attend their Lodge meetings.

SOCIALISTS REALISING IMPORTANCE OF WORK IN INDUSTRIAL FIELD.

It is interesting to notice that the Socialist movement has undergone a change of attitude towards the Trade Union movement. It no longer dismisses the Trade Union movement as reactionary, it no longer falls into despair after each industrial rebuff, but throws itself entirely into the industrial movement, realising that there must be built up the industrial structure that will overthrow capitalism and will afterwards carry on production in the new society.

THE FUTURE.

Grave and serious problems lie ahead, but the miners can face them with the confidence and assurance that are born of scientific knowledge—the knowledge that they are fighting reaction and are aided by social dynamic forces. The miners' Jahweh is the realisation that men's ideas are a reflection of their material condition of production, and that with a change of the latter a change of the former must inevitably follow. The present social mode of production is changing men's idea, and the day cannot be far off when individual ownership of the social processes will be replaced by common ownership and control. Armed with this knowledge, the miner will go forward, undeterred by temporary checks or rebuffs, uninfluenced by the appeals which given situations make to sentiment, considering only the goal, which is human welfare in its largest sense. The miner now begins to realise that this can only be achieved by harnessing one's activities to economic progress.

"PLEBIAN."

THE RENT STRIKE.

When the War started, prices immediately began to soar and rents soon followed, especially in the munition areas. In 1915 matters came to a head when working women in various parts of the country announced that they would refuse to pay any more rent till it should be brought down to the pre-war level. As a result of this action the Rent Act was passed which prevented the raising of rents on working-class houses for the period of the War.

The Glasgow Rent Strike was the largest and most important.

Mrs. Helen Crawford, who took a leading part in this strike, writes:—

"The Glasgow housing conditions have been for many years a grave scandal. The working classes of this great industrial centre are huddled together like cattle. In the 36,000 single apartment houses in the city, the proletariat is born, eats, sleeps, dies—the living members having to eat and sleep beside the dead until they can make arrangements for burying. Many 'houses' consist of but one or two rooms. A house with two rooms and a kitchen can only be afforded by a highly-skilled workman. Every room is slept in—there are always one or two beds in the kitchen. If there is a sitting-room, there is generally a cupboard in the wall which is used as a bed, the cupboard door being left open at night to let in air.

"From August 4th, 1914, till November, 1915, the increased activity of the shipyards and munition factories brought a big influx of workers to Glasgow, and, consequently, a greater demand for houses.

"Full advantage of this demand was taken by property owners, who immediately began to raise the already exorbitant rents and to serve eviction notices upon those who refused to pay the increase. Aged people whose sons were serving with the Colours and women with young children and husbands at the front, were ordered to quit."

The mass of Glasgow workers were up in arms, and the women, especially, were seething with a militant unrest. The masses were eager for action and the organised Labour movement was enthusiastic for the struggle.

The Glasgow Women's Housing Association, which had been formed some years before, became the medium through which these forces found expression. It was professedly a non-political organisation, but when it began to organise meetings of protest against the increased rents, and to collect and publish cases of hardship, the entire Labour movement rallied to its support. Women flocked to join it from all the classes on whom the increased rents pressed hard, and the women, whether old or new members of the Housing Association, or women of the Labour and Socialist, or special women's organisations, were the most active and energetic workers in the campaign. Helen Crawford continues:—

"The meetings were attended by huge and enthusiastic crowds. Committees were formed in the different districts, and to these committees notices of eviction were brought. The women decided upon a rent strike. Members of the Housing Association were instructed to offer the pre-war rent if the factor should call, *but to refuse to pay the increase*. Oblong cards were sold twelve inches by six, on which were printed the words:—

RENT STRIKE.

WE ARE NOT REMOVING.

"These were eagerly bought and hung up in the windows. It was a common sight to pass through a working-class district and see these cards in every window.

The district committees arranged meetings in the streets where eviction notices had been served.

"Picketing was organised. Most of the Glasgow houses are built on the tenement system. In order to a low, the women to get on with their household duties, one woman picket would sit in the entrance passage, which in Scotland we call the close. She always carried with her a bell. If the Sheriff's officer appeared, she rang the bell vigorously and the women came running from every quarter—leaving their baking, but sometimes bringing flour, water and other things to throw at the officer. Few Sheriffs' officers cared to wait long! "The movement spread like wildfire through the city; big collections were given at the meetings and collections were also taken in the shipbuilding yards for our advertisements and propaganda.

"Twelve tenants were summoned to appear before the Sheriff on November 17th, 1915, for refusal to pay increased rent.

"The Women's Housing Association decided to go with the tenants to the Court, and notices were sent into the shipyards and factories asking the men to come out for the day and join in the procession.

"We shall never forget that morning! Thousands of workmen left work at the breakfast hour, and marched in procession from East and West to the Sheriff's Court in the centre of the city. With their grimy clothes and their grim, determined faces, they looked formidable.

"The Courthouse was soon filled. Thousands of people surrounded the building and crowded the streets adjoining. From boxes and lorries men and women addressed the multitude.

"A deputation was sent in to interview the Sheriff. The crowded courtyard, the thousands of workmen outside, struck terror to the heart of the authorities. Moreover, the war work of the munition factories and shipyards was being held up.

"Negotiations between Council and Sheriff were held, telegrams and telephone messages were exchanged with Whitehall.

"It ended in the twelve summonses being dismissed, the Sheriff saying that the Ministry of Munitions would investigate the matter, the men being asked to go back to their work meantime.

"The Rent Restriction Act was then hurriedly passed through Parliament; the workers in England, Ireland and Wales sharing the benefits of that courageous fight put up by the working women of Glasgow, backed by the *direct industrial action* of the men."

HELEN CRAWFORD.

Rent strikes took place also in London and other places, but the Glasgow rent strike was by far the largest, most successful and most militant.

At the close of the strike, the Women's Housing Association and its active Women's District Committees soon disappeared. An effort was made to keep the committees in being to deal with other problems, but the masses of its supporters had rushed together to secure redress of one burning grievance, and no other, equally striking and easily dealt with, was to hand. The disintegration of the Housing Association was hastened by dissension amongst its supporters. The Labour Party desired to make it the Labour Women's Housing Association, and to attach it to the Labour Party. Some of the active women desired the Association to be non-party. Two organisations were formed and both speedily dwindled.

Comrades are urged to volunteer to sell the "Workers' Dreadnought" on Trade terms at all meetings of every description in their particular districts. Write to "Workers' Dreadnought," 152, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.