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MT. ISA

THE GREAT QUEENSLAND STRIKE

BY BRETТА CARTHEY & BOB POTTER.



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INTRODUCTION

This is the story of what was probably the greatest labour dispute in post-war Australian history. Very little has been heard about these events in the British working class movement. This in itself is a telling symptom of how successfully both our rulers, and those who claim to speak on our behalf, have succeeded in isolating and dividing workers from one another.

About 18 months ago some 2,000 Australian miners were involved in a struggle, sustained for several months, against the combined forces of employer (Mount Isa Mines Ltd.), state authority (the Queensland Government) and trade union officialdom (the bureaucrats of the Australian Workers Union).

This bitter and prolonged dispute had all the hallmarks and contained all the ingredients of major industrial struggles in the era of modern bureaucratic capitalism. Everyone acted true to colours: the employers, driven by their need to maximize profits and to control ever more closely every aspect of the labour process; adjudicators, judges, police and state authorities as more or less conscious instruments of this ruling class; the trade union leaders as appendages of Established society, seeking to compel the workers to conform to the requirements of that society. The workers were on their own. It is this latter fact which the Mt. Isa dispute shows up most clearly.

After reading this pamphlet some may conclude that the union officials 'sold out' the miners. Others that 'more pressure from below' would have prevented the leaders from acting as they did. Still others that a different leadership would have achieved better results. In our opinion these explanations all fall short of the mark.

They don't stress the main lesson: the need for self-activity and self-organization whenever workers are in struggle, or the need to keep the control of the struggle in their own hands, or the need to link up with rank and file bodies in other industries - and in the same industry on a wider geographical basis - or the need for solidarity support to include solidarity action if it is to be really effective. Above all they fail to stress the need to understand the real nature of the trade union bureaucracy and to dispel all illusions as to whose side it is on.

The trade union leaders are not misguided, illogical, timid or muddle headed men who occasionally 'sell out'. On the contrary. What needs to be stressed is their perfectly logical, consistent attitude, year in, year out, in every country of the modern world. The trade union bureaucracy is becoming increasingly conscious of its role and interests. Today it is even developing an ideology of its own.

Workers should understand what this process really means. They should recognize the new enemy within their own ranks. And then all the necessary conclusions should be drawn.

Australia may be at the Antipodes but the labour bureaucracy is right here, in our midst, as it is in every modern capitalist country. The Labour Britain of Messrs Wilson, Gunter and Brown would not have acted very differently, if confronted with a challenge on a similar scale. Not for all the squeaks or squawks of all the 'entrists', nor for all their protest resolutions or deputations to Parliament. Those who pledged the Labour leaders their 'critical support' should not moan when they discover they have given the bosses a new stick with which to beat us.



AUSTRALIA: THE LABOUR SCENE

The Commonwealth of Australia was born on January 1, 1901. Previously the Australian States had existed as separate Crown Colonies, politically independent of each other. It was the reluctance of each colony to surrender too many of its rights that made Australia emerge as a federation and not as a unitary state.

The Australian Constitution provides a strict division of powers between the Federal and State Parliaments. The Federal Parliament has absolute authority in fields such as customs and excise, coinage, posts and telegraphs, but shares 'industrial regulation' with state authorities. Generally speaking, the Federal Government can only intervene where an industrial dispute extends beyond state limits. (The dispute we will be describing in the following pages was confined to Queensland, and hence the interventions against the miners were essentially interventions of the Queensland State Government).

Quite elaborate and often compulsory conciliation and arbitration machinery has been set up over the years at both State and Federal level. The first of several acts in this field was passed in 1904 and modifications were made over the years. In 1947 the post-war Labour Government extended the scope of the acts, and they were further modified in 1956. Acceptance of the machinery of conciliation and arbitration by a trade union generally means statutory restriction of the right to strike. In certain circumstances penalties may be inflicted on registered unions which indulge in strikes and stoppages.

The Australian Trade Union movement began in the 1830s, as 'trade societies'. The 1850s saw the great gold rushes, the population trebled, and great numbers of immigrant workers brought their revolutionary militancy from Europe. In 1858 the stonemasons in Melbourne achieved the 8-hour day. By 1889 there were 124 unions with a membership of 54,000. (The population of Australia was then 2½ million).

Today there are 350 unions, the largest being the Australian Workers Union (1) with a membership of about 200,000 embracing practically all rural industries, construction workers, and others, especially in Queensland. The next largest is the AEU with 80,000 members.

One of the few worthwhile sociological studies of Australia in the 1960s is 'The Lucky Country' by Donald Horne. The following quotation (p.139) gives a picture of the Aussie worker in relation to the official union organization not at all unfamiliar to his English counterpart.

'... Most Australian unionists are normally indifferent to their unions, and do not participate to a great extent in their affairs. Hardly any attend union meetings (although job meetings are better attended), less than half vote in union elections (sometimes much less) and they are often slow in paying union dues. The greatest enthusiasm is often aroused for some "unofficial" strike or protest when men in a shop take action without consulting the union, or in defiance of it; this kind of action can still have some meaning for them. ... Their indifference may be partly a protest against the irrelevance of union ideologies to the life Australians lead in the 1960s.' (my emphasis, B.P.)

This is putting it mildly, to say the least.

The story of the Mount Isa dispute is an important one. Its ingredients are, in a nutshell, those of bureaucratic capitalism in action - the workers fighting against the 'unholy alliance' of international capital, state authority (in the form of the judicial and police departments) and the official trade union 'leadership'.

For seven months Mount Isa dominated the front page of every Australian newspaper. The glorious fight of the miners deserves the respect of the workers of all lands. The story has not yet been fully told in Britain and Solidarity considers it a duty to do so.

(1) The A.W.U. began as the Australian Shearers' Union, in the 19th century. Even as the A.W.U. its activities were at first confined to the pastoral industry.

MOUNT ISA MINES

Mount Isa is a remote outback town, 1,300 miles from Brisbane, capital of Queensland. The mining area is surrounded by hundreds of square miles of tropical desert. In the summer it's stinking hot. Millions of blow flies make outdoor life a misery by day, and the mosquitoes launch their attacks by night. The nearest coast is more than 600 miles away.

Before the mine was sunk, and the precious copper, silver, lead and zinc began rising to the earth's surface, there was no township at Mt. Isa. (2) Prior to the dispute the town's population had reached some 16,000 people, 5,000 of whom were employed by the mine in one capacity or another. By the end of the dispute, the population had dropped to 10,000.

The mine itself is vast. Men work in twenty odd levels, running out of a shaft that goes down nearly 4,000 feet. On the lower levels the heat is unbearable. There is a standing joke that if a Mt. Isa miner went to hell, the first thing he would ask for would be an overcoat. The mine supplies 70% of Australia's copper production, 30% of the silver, 15% of the lead and 10% of the zinc. The products of the mine are worth £30 million a year to Australia's trade balances.

In the ten year period 1953-1963 Mt. Isa Mines Ltd. (MIM) disclosed net profits of more than £38 million, more than six times the capital invested at the beginning of the period. Every £1 originally invested has brought back more than £4 to the shareholders (most of whom would be unable to find Mt. Isa on a map). In addition there have been numerous bonus share issues. The 1963 issue increased the capital figure from £9 million to £23 million, without a single extra penny being invested. Profits for 1963 therefore appear not as 97% on capital, but as the much more modest 23%.

Slightly more than 54% of the shares are owned by the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO), part of the Guggenheim group. ASARCO has similar mineral interests in Zambia, Peru and Mexico. However the management of the mine is Australian - there are no Americans on the board of directors or in senior staff positions.(3)

The 'method' of running the mine, however, has all the characteristics of 20th century 'American efficiency', with time study, speed-up and intensified supervision

carried to the n^{th} degree. There is in fact one supervisor for every four men!

It says a lot for the 'conditions of work' that in 1963-64, before the dispute erupted, the annual labour turnover was 52% (the average number employed during the year was 3,934, and the number who left 2,059).

Compared with the rest of Australia the wage rates are high, but the cost of living is very high. As at June 1964 the basic wage (4) in Brisbane was £14.10.0. In Mt. Isa, prices are often twice as high as in the capital. Reporter Shirley Golt described her visit to Mt. Isa in the 'Woman's Day' of January 11, 1965:

'I'll give you just one instance of the sort of thing a woman has to contend with setting up home in Mt. Isa. The other day a miner's wife showed me a lounge suite she had bought in Brisbane and brought up here by road. It cost her £46.5.0. She pointed out an identical suite in a furniture shop here. The price tag was £90... All the wives I spoke to complained about food prices - oranges and apples 9/- a dozen, a small lettuce 3/-, bread 2/- a loaf, soft drinks 2/6 a small bottle.'

Like everything else in Mt. Isa, the cost of housing is extortionate. Many of the workers live in Company-owned houses, which gives Mt. Isa Mines even greater control over their labour force. Some workers are buying their houses, and others live in rented houses. Even the electricity, at 5d. a unit, costs twice as much as in Melbourne.

(2) Copper was first discovered there in 1923. The only other important source of Australian copper is Mount Morgan.

(3) During the dispute, great play was made with the fact that the majority of the shares were American owned. We feel this is a mistaken attitude. It almost implies that it's O.K. to be robbed by an Australian capitalist, but intolerable when it's a Yankee capitalist. To a socialist the nationality of the capitalist is surely irrelevant?

(4) Each state in Australia has a declared 'basic wage'. Originally it was the minimum amount considered essential for a reasonable standard of living, and was determined by a Court of Enquiry. During the depression years of the 1930s the terms of reference used to determine the basic wage were changed. They became 'the exposition of a predominant principle of basic wage assessment, namely the principle that the level of wages, and of the basic wage in particular, must be such as the economy can sustain'.

THE WAGE STRUCTURE

The six month clash between men and management was the climax of a series of dissatisfactions and grievances going back a decade or more. Superficially, and at first sight, the clash was about money. As the struggle developed it became obvious that much more fundamental issues were at stake. Indeed the concessions of the management on the economic demands later appeared almost irrelevant. The workers at Mt. Isa, like the majority of workers everywhere, (5) were challenging basic management 'rights'.

We must now go back to 1959. The fluctuating weekly lead bonus had dropped to about £3.10.0. The craft unions moved for an absolute minimum bonus of £8.10.0, but before their claim could be heard by the Industrial Court, Mt. Isa Mines registered an agreement with the A.W.U. bureaucrats for a £5 minimum bonus. This had two effects. On the one hand it aroused strong feelings between the A.W.U. and the craft unions; on the other it isolated the A.W.U. officials from their rank and file.

The A.W.U. action fed the demands for an on-the-spot negotiating body. Such a body did, in fact, exist. It was an 'Industrial Council', composed of local delegates from the A.W.U. and from the combined craft unions. Ken Morgan, a member of the Clerks Union was one of this Council's leading members. Because of his activities and those of his comrades on behalf of rank and file democracy, this particular branch was soon disbanded by Union headquarters.

There were two forms of wage payments at Mt. Isa.

Award Rates provided a minimum wage and (prior to the dispute) a bonus of £8 per week. The total award rate was £25.10.0. per week.

Alternatively, there were the Contract Rates (piece rates). Each worker employed on the contract system undertakes, in a legal agreement, to work at a figure which he sets up in individual bargaining with the Company. At Mt. Isa a figure 30% above the award rate became the minimum contract rate. By working like a slave a contract worker before 1961 could earn up to £8 a day. But for this he had to buy all his own explosives and working clothes, etc.

By mid-1964 this £8 per day had been steadily decreased to about £6.10.0. per day (for the same output).

The workers at Mt. Isa have the choice as to which system of wage payment they prefer.

Early in 1961 a dispute over bonus wage payments (6) broke out between workers and management at both Mt. Isa Mine and the nearby Mary Kathleen (7) Uranium mine. Both disputes went to the Industrial Commission.

The Mary Kathleen case was considered first. The uranium miners were granted a 25% bonus increase to £10 per week. Immediately following this, and before the Commission had time to arbitrate on the second dispute, the Queensland Government legislated to prohibit the Commission from raising the bonus. The bonus, after being an industrial matter for 30 years, was now declared to be no concern of the industrial commission.

The legislation was very one-sided. It allowed the court to decrease or abrogate any existing bonus, but prevented it from increasing rates or initiating new bonus payments.

(5) See, for example, 'Year Book of Commonwealth of Australia', No. 50, 1964, p. 502.

Causes of Industrial Disputes in Australia

Cause of Dispute	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
	<u>Number of Disputes</u>				
Wages, hours and leave	105	213	123	290	279
Working conditions and managerial policy.	556	648	525	707	748
Trade unionism	86	127	66	92	115
Other	122	157	101	94	108
Total	869	1145	815	1183	1250

(6) These had been steadily falling from the 1952 figure of £17.5.0 per week to £3.17.6 per week in 1959.

(7) Australia's most valuable source of uranium, discovered there in 1954.

PRELUDE

By the middle of 1964 the miners at Mt. Isa were absolutely fed up with the continual attack on their real wages by the almost open alliance of management and State government. In response to mounting pressure from below, the A.W.U. applied to the Industrial Commission for a £4 per week wage increase all round. The demand was promptly rejected by the Commission who argued it was a request for a 'prosperity bonus', and that, due to the 1961 legislation, the granting of such a bonus was outside its jurisdiction. A direct approach to the Company led to an equally blunt refusal.

On August 23, the A.W.U. underground miners accepted a union recommendation immediately to revert from contract rates to award rates.

Production dropped drastically. Miners refused to accept gang contracts whereby, for example, a gang would contract to sink a shaft at, say, £5 per foot.

For the employer the contract system was by far the most profitable. More ore was produced from the most difficult places. To maintain the same level of production on award rates, they would need to employ twice the number of men. By banning contract work the men, while sacrificing considerable wages themselves, were striking a powerful blow at the management. The entire organization of production was based on the contract system.

MIM claimed that the refusal of the men to work contract comprised a go-slow 'strike'. On September 7, the Industrial Commission was advised of the dispute by the Company. The management requested the Commission to endorse the 'strike definition'. This was no minor haggling over words. Under Australian law, if a strike is planned, the Industrial Court must be notified in advance, and a secret ballot must be held before the strike takes place. Otherwise the strike is 'unauthorized' and the strikers can incur heavy penalties.

On September 30, the Industrial Court declared that the action of the men amounted to a strike, and that as none of the recognized procedure had been followed, the strike was unauthorized. A mass meeting of Mt. Isa miners promptly refused to be sidetracked by this piece of legal jiggery-pokery. The men voted to continue the ban on contract work for another week, until their next monthly meeting.

One week later a mass meeting of A.W.U. members heard a recommendation of their union executive that they revert to contract work. The official speakers were howled down by the indignant men, and the proposal was overwhelmingly rejected. No one was particularly upset as the officials walked out of the meeting. The men voted for Pat Mackie, the chairman, to keep the meeting going.

Twelve days later Pat Mackie was sacked by Mt. Isa Mines. (8)

A further mass meeting of A.W.U. members; on October 25, voted against a return to contract work, and also passed a vote of no confidence in their State Executive. The miners had learned very quickly that they weren't only taking on the management and the State apparatus (in the form of the Industrial Court), but also the official A.W.U. leadership.

On December 3, the Industrial Commission issued Restraining Orders against all A.W.U. members from taking part in an 'unauthorized' strike. Three days later a mass meeting of A.W.U. members provided the now usual spectacle of union officials being over-ruled and shouted down. Once again Pat Mackie was voted into the chair. The meeting turned from an 'official' meeting into an 'unofficial' one. The overwhelming majority of the men voted to ignore the Restraining Orders.

Five days later Pat Mackie was expelled from the A.W.U.

On December 9, the Company announced the cessation of all underground copper mining, as from December 11.

The battle had begun in earnest.

(8) Mackie wanted leave of absence to attend to Union business; as no one in authority would grant the necessary permission, he took time off and was dismissed. It was an open secret that the dismissal had taken place with the full blessing of the A.W.U. officials.

PAT MACKIE

In any industrial struggle it is frequently the case that someone, often a colourful figure, emerges as the chief representative and spokesman of the workers. The success or failure of a particular battle is often determined by the ability of this 'figurehead' to express in his mere being, the aims and aspirations of his class. At Mt. Isa this role was played by Pat Mackie. It is worth saying a little about him, so closely does he embody some of the basic characteristics of the Aussie worker of today.

Pat Mackie was born in New Zealand in 1914. He went to sea at 16, driven by 'a terrific desire to know how people lived in other parts of the world'. He was ashore in Canada for a short time in 1933 (where he acquired his Canadian accent). For the next 16 years he remained at sea, and came to know particularly well the U.S. ports of New York, Baltimore and New Orleans. In 1940 he organized a strike of news boys in New York.

In 1949 he returned to New Zealand and toyed with the idea of building a boat for himself. In 1951 he went to Australia. For 8 years he worked his own little lead mine near Burketown, not far from Mt. Isa. MIM were quite used to dealing with their minor competitors. By fixing quotas at an uneconomic price they were able to buy him out. Pat Mackie went to work for Mt. Isa Mines.

He had a natural personality that made him extremely popular with men, whether as a wrestler in local competitions, a baseball enthusiast, or as chairman of union meetings. In the eyes of many workers it was greatly to his credit that he publicly dissociated himself from the traditional political parties. He described politics and religion as so much 'hocus-pocus'.

Prior to his appeal against his dismissal from Mt. Isa Mines he was asked by a reporter of 'Nation' (20/2/65) whether he would be represented at the hearing by the A.W.U. He replied that he wanted to start off from scratch - not behind scratch!

The frequent 'Newsletters' published by Mackie and his colleagues during the dispute were masterpieces of writing. They bluntly expressed the deepest feelings of the miners. Take for example the following extract from issue No.4, published in November 1964.

'What about the character on 13 level who the Finns (9) have so aptly named Sputnik? The little maggot who supervises jobs with a stop-watch? Is he frustrated because he can't use his whistle on the job too, to make men start running - or stop running? What about the top underground bosses, the exalted mine managers who snoop around on alternative four hour night shift vigils? Does ASARCO pay them overtime to scab on their own supervisors? Nice people aren't they!

Stay on wages!

or grab your pinkies and find work elsewhere!'

(9) There were some 41 nationalities employed at Mt. Isa. As a 'national group' the Finns were noted for their militancy.

NZ Unions swing behind Mt. Isa miners

THE wide support for the struggle of the Mt. Isa men and their womenfolk against US-controlled Mt. Isa Mines has been further strengthened by international support.

"Peoples Voice" in New Zealand reports that the National Council of the New Zealand Federation of Labor has issued a financial appeal to aid the Mt. Isa workers and the appeal is obtaining growing success.

Waikato miners, Grey Valley miners, Auckland and Wellington seamen, and drivers and Wellington waterside workers have already taken up collections.

The United Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in America have sent 100 dollars as a token of solidarity. Many members of this union work for American Smelting and Refining, the parent company of Mt. Isa Mines.

Messages of support have also come from the Miners' Trades Department of the World Federation of Trade Unions and from the Metal and Engineering Workers' secretary in Cyprus.

Financial support is continuing to come from all parts of Australia. The continuation of this support has become more urgent, due to the stopping of financial assistance by the leaders of the Australian Workers' Union.

Queensland reports point to many refusals by employers to give work to ex-Mt. Isa miners.

Similarly, the sacking last week of four Mt. Isa miners from the Manapouri power tunnel project at West Arm in New Zealand has further spotlighted the role of employers generally and some AWU leaders in this dispute.

These dismissals took place following an approach by the president of NZ Workers' Union (Mr. W. Dempster) to the contractors.

The four men said they were all married with families to support and were being "starved into returning to work in the Mt. Isa mines."

One of the men, Mr. G. Rigano, also pointed out the close relationship between the AWU leadership and the NZWU leadership.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

By now it had become clear that the officials of the A.W.U. were not going to succeed in disciplining the men. The next move was made by the Queensland government, acting with brutal efficiency at the instigation of State Premier Nicklin. On December 10, the government declared a State of Emergency.(10)

The 'Order-in-Council', effective from December 14, ordered the miners to resume contract and/or piece work.

A mass meeting of A.W.U. members on December 13 followed what by now was the standard pattern. First the officials had their little say, and urged the men to heed the government's instructions and return to contract work. They were booed and hissed from the meeting.

Pat Mackie was elected to chair the now 'unofficial' meeting, which pledged itself to ignore the government's declaration of a 'state of emergency', despite the possible penalties of fines at the rate of £100 a day, or six months imprisonment.

The following day, December 14, the government issued a further Order-in-Council. This permitted the Company to dismiss

or suspend all workers refusing contract work. Within 24 hours all miners previously employed on contract were dismissed - nearly 2,000 men. At 4 pm, December 15, the Company ceased operations.

It was a lock-out. Let us recapitulate. The men had repeatedly expressed their willingness to work - all they objected to was the contract system as such. Under the Company's own 'Conditions of Employment' they were acting within their rights. Neither the Company nor the Industrial Commission had any legal authority to force them to work the contract system.

The entire enterprise of Mt. Isa Mines ground to a halt. The smelter was closed. This was pure industrial blackmail. Theiss Brothers, who mine ore by the open-cut method, could have provided adequate ores to keep the smelters going.

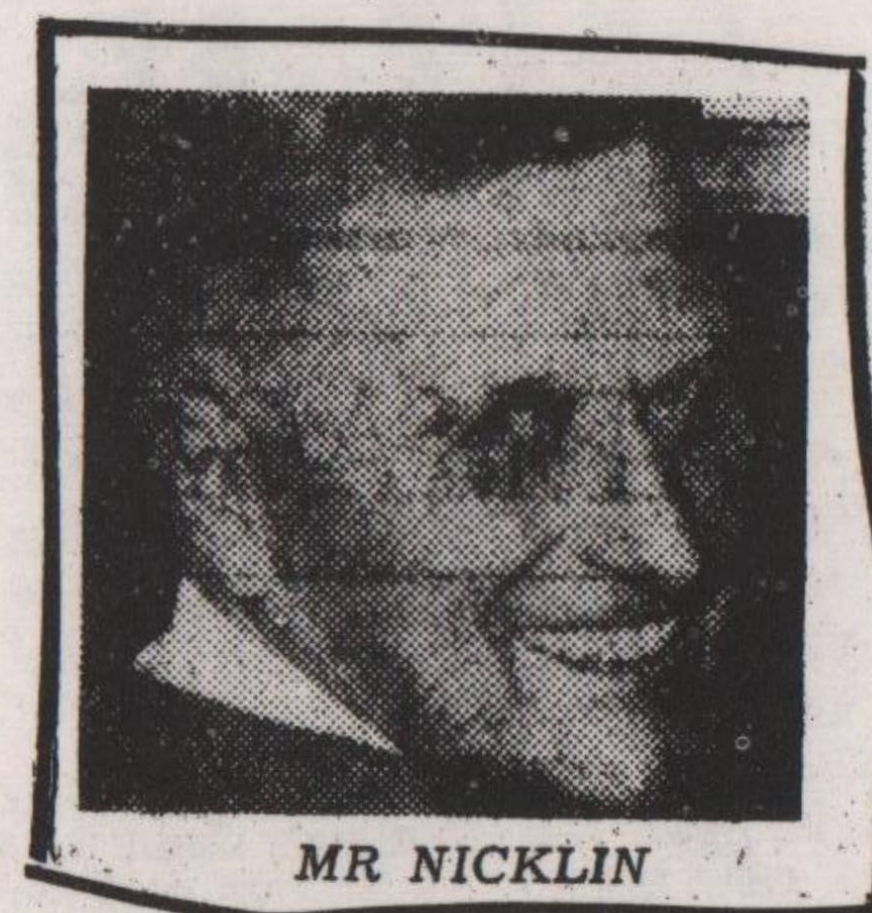
Viewed from the international interests of ASARCO the closing down of Mt. Isa was not such a bad venture. In a very short time the price of copper had doubled. ASARCO was soon importing copper from South America into Australia at £650 per ton as compared with the pre-dispute price of £340 per ton.

Many militants argue that ASARCO welcomed the dispute for just this reason - to force the Australian Government to raise the price of copper. It was undoubtedly a factor to be considered.

(10) This was done under the Transports Acts, 1938-1943. The excuse was that government railway revenue had fallen sharply in the 14 weeks of the dispute!

Nicklin urged to force Isa men back to work

Pressure is mounting on the Queensland Government to order a return to work at Mount Isa through the Industrial Court following the failure of a final conference between union leaders and the industrial commissioner, Mr H. J. Harvey at the weekend.



MR NICKLIN

LEADERS V.

RANK AND FILE

Under modern capitalism the trade union bureaucracy is more or less completely integrated into the structure of the state. This applies to the A.W.U. with a vengeance. The 'friends of management' in Australia never fail to give their sympathy and support to the reigning general secretary of the A.W.U., Tim Dougherty. This man is in virtual control over who gets in and who goes out, and makes elections, where they take place, absolutely meaningless. It is no surprise that the Conservative 'Bulletin' (13/3/65) could describe the A.W.U., during the Mt. Isa dispute, as 'the main anti-communist industrial force in the North'.

Industrial action at Mt. Isa was initially taken on the recommendation of the union leadership. But as soon as the fight developed beyond the stage of 'passing resolutions', and came to a real confrontation with management, the union leadership very quickly backed down. It recommended that the men toe the line.

Within two months of the onset of the dispute, the union leadership was in quite open alliance with both management and government against the workers. It was inevitable, if the movement was to go forward, that the workers find or create new organizations with which to continue the struggle. This movement to break the power of the A.W.U. bureaucracy took two channels, both leading in much the same direction.

The Committee for Membership Control was formed in Broken Hill, about 15 years ago. It consists entirely of A.W.U. members opposed to the present union regime, which it described as 'government by officials, for officials'.

Mt. Isa **Prayer Crusade**

The Anglican Bishop of North Queensland, Bishop I.W.A. Shevill, has launched an Australia-wide interdenominational prayer crusade to restore industrial harmony to Mt. Isa.

In its early days the Committee largely arose from the struggle between Dougherty and Clyde Cameron (ll), Member of H.R. for Hindmarsh, South Australia, and former A.W.U. State secretary. More recently however the Committee had recruited quite widely not only in South Australia, but also at Mt. Isa and Mount Morgan. It had also been extending its work into the sugar industry. It had approximately 1,000 members at Mt. Isa.

The aims of the CMC were fundamentally anti-bureaucratic. Its offices were based on the principle of rotating leadership. Misusing words as only the illiterate can, the official A.W.U. leadership described the CMC as 'a bunch of scabs'! (See 'Vision', March 1965)

The other channel directed at smashing the power monopoly of the A.W.U. locally was the Mt. Isa Trades and Labour Council. This body was formed from the craft unions and accepted supporters of the CMC as affiliated members. It was 'not recognized' by the A.W.U., and had no 'legal status' in the dispute. Indeed its President, J. Mc Mahon, was forcibly removed from an aeroplane at Longreach by police officers to prevent him flying to Mt. Isa during the dispute. The Trades and Labour Council was frequently attacked and slandered as 'Communist dominated', but carried out valuable propaganda and financial work on behalf of the strikers.

By now the national press was getting warmed up. The 'bogey men' were being taken out of their wrappers. 'A well-known communist is known to be heading for Mt. Isa' was about the best they could do (to this day no one has succeeded in naming a single communist employed at Mt. Isa). Mackie was himself to be subjected to massive attacks - when other epithets such as 'criminal', 'gangster' and 'communist' became too tame, he became an 'anarchist'!

In a very different language, the CMC issued regular leaflets, written in a down-to-earth prose not heard for many years. A leaflet that made headlines claimed 'We don't need courts, we don't need governments we don't need commissions to decide this issue'.

During the dispute the A.W.U. withdrew all physical and financial support from the Australian Labour Party following criticism of A.W.U. policy by two prominent Labour MPs, Clyde Cameron and Dr. J. Cairns (Victoria).

(Australian, 25.2.65.)

An early leaflet laid down six points necessary for industrial peace at Mt. Isa.

1. Re-instatement of Pat Mackie.
2. Wage increase of £4 per week.
('... negotiations should take place right here... they should not be determined by a bunch of guys who know nothing about Isa (and possibly care less), sitting in their air conditioned chambers a thousand miles away from the heat, the dust, the flies and the fumes which are our normal daily dose' .)
3. Amendment of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act.
('Imagine any government in the world bringing down legislation solely to protect the selfish interests of a single employer against his own workers. Yet the Nicklin Government has done just that. We demand the immediate removal of the Mt. Isa Mines clause in the Arbitration Act.')
4. All round increase of £1 in shift allowances.
5. Contract rates to be increased by 25% and complete revision.
At present there is no standard form of contract. In fact the existing contract reference committee domina-

ted as they are by the A.W.U. hierarchy is a tool of the boss. Future contract conditions must be determined by the Mt. Isa Labour Council.

6. Recognition of the Labour Council as negotiating body.

We can determine these things ourselves as they do in Broken Hill!

One of the best leaflets produced by the men came out in January 1965 over the imprint of the Mt. Isa Trades and Labour Council. Entitled 'The Truth Will Out' and written throughout in the form of a catechism, it ended:

'Let us be fair dinkum and weigh the issues in this dispute. Broken Hill miners have the wages and conditions commensurate with their skill and local environment. We have not. The similarities in the occupations and production are almost identical, yet the people of Broken Hill are miles in front.

'Ask yourself these questions honestly: Do you believe the company cannot afford to pay? Do you believe the mine would close its gates for one man? Do you believe this huge enterprise is repaying to Queensland in any shape or form what it should in the exploitation of our resources?

'Don't be duped by propaganda and smear tactics. Seek the truth.'

MOUNT ISA MINES LIMITED

Report to Stockholders

In view of the most recent developments in the industrial dispute which has closed down the mine, I feel it is essential that you, as a stockholder, should be acquainted with all the facts leading up to the situation as it stands at present.

As your Chairman, at the very outset I would like to convey the Board's appreciation of the warm-hearted and spontaneous support of so many stockholders who have expressed their confidence in it during this trying period.

It is a source of great personal regret that I am unable to report a return to normal operations at Mount Isa, although no effort has been spared by your Board to achieve this end.

I am sure you have followed the progress of the dispute through the normal channels of press, radio and television and will have read the Company's "Report to the People" and "Appeal to Reason" published throughout Australia.

Although the various developments in the dispute are set out in detail below, I feel it is necessary to comment on some pertinent facts.

Despite high wages, participation in Company earnings, generous superannuation and other benefits and provision of community services and amenities, we were presented with demands which no responsible Board of Directors could accept.

Our refusal was used by a small but highly organised and fanatical group to bring about a state of fear and chaos in Mount Isa. Conference after conference, presided over by Industrial Commissioner, Mr. H. J. Harvey, was held. The Commissioner's recommendation, subsequently repeated on a number of occasions—and supported by the Queensland Branch Secretary of the Australian Workers' Union—that the men should return to work was rejected.

Orders by the Queensland Industrial Commission restraining the Union and miners from being a party to a ban on contract work, and by the Government to accept contract work, were defied.

The real tragedy of the dispute is that the great majority of our employees are decent, law-abiding and efficient workmen, many with wives and young families, who have staked their all in Mount Isa.

TOO LATE

Suddenly, unexpectedly, on December 15, the Industrial Court upheld an appeal by the A.W.U. against the Commission's grounds for refusing the £4 per week wage increase. On December 24 the Industrial Commission awarded the miners a 'prosperity loading' of £3 per week!! So much for those who argue that courts aren't influenced by the militancy of workers!

But this capitulation came much too late. Other, more important, issues were now at stake. All it achieved was problems for the 'lawyers' to unravel. (12)

A 'compulsory conference' took place early in January 1965 between Mt. Isa Mines and officials of the A.W.U. Concessions came from the management leading to amendments being proposed to the contract system - amendments that might well have been acceptable six months earlier. But now things were different. The men had completely lost confidence in the A.W.U. officials. They wanted to do their own negotiating. They were determined not to accept the victimization of Pat Mackie or any other of their elected spokesmen.

Following the 'compulsory conference', Mt. Isa Mines proclaimed that it would not reinstate Mackie, nor would it recognize the Mt. Isa Trades and Labour Council as the future negotiating body. It was announced that the Industrial Commission would address a mass meeting of all employees the following day, and, with the full support of the A.W.U. officials, recommend a return to work.

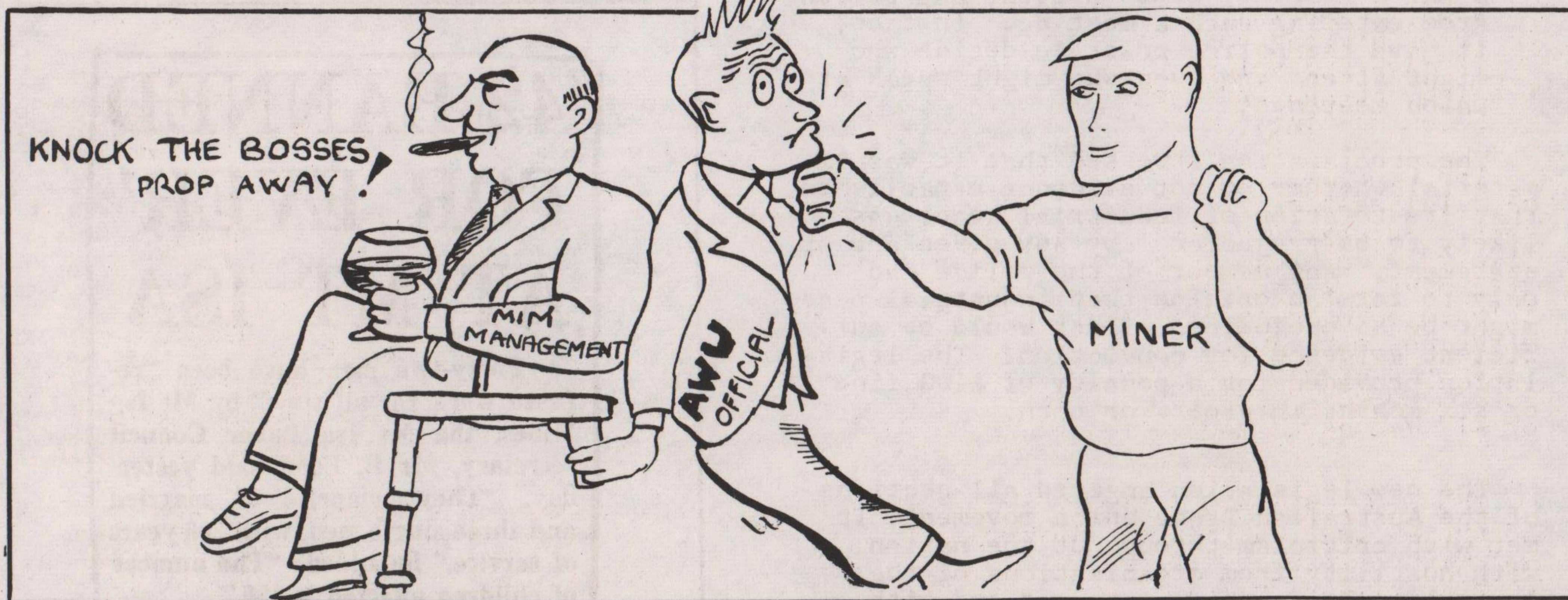
On January 16, the said meeting took place. The A.W.U. officials were shouted down, and the Commissioner left without speaking. Next day a mass meeting of miners, open to the public at large, reaffirmed their determination to carry on the struggle.

The government replied with threats (January 19), a new Order-in-Council giving wide police powers 'to prevent any picketing, intimidation and subversion' (January 22) and the flying in of more police into Mt. Isa, to implement the new order (January 28).

(12) As the Australian (7.4.65) was to point out: 'When the miners applied for a £4 a week rise they were told such an increase would be equivalent to a rise in the bonus. The State Industrial Act prevented the commission from increasing the bonus, the miners were told, so bad luck.

'In a strange judgment during the later stages of the dispute, this decision was reversed by the President of the Industrial Court, and a £3 a week rise was later granted on the grounds that it was a "prosperity loading".'

'This judgment has left the meaning and effect of the original legislation in complete legal confusion, and has set a precedent amounting almost to an invitation to more agitation for prosperity loadings in other sectors of industry in Queensland.'



NAKED CLASS RULE

Mt. Isa Mines declared its intention to close all departments of the mine. In a last attempt to force the workers back, the Nicklin Government decided to withdraw the iron fist from the velvet glove and to resort to naked class rule.

Nicklin's 'Order-in-Council' contained the most far-reaching and repressive industrial legislation in Australian history. It provided:

1. For arrest, seizure and search without a warrant.
2. For unrestricted censorship.
3. For any member of the police force, above the rank of sergeant, to expel anybody from the Mt. Isa or Cloncurry mineral fields (an area covering some hundreds of square miles).
4. Police officers were given power to prevent anybody, anywhere in Queensland, from going to or returning to the Mt. Isa or Cloncurry mineral fields.
5. Any member of the police was granted the right forcibly to remove any person from a union meeting, or to prevent any person from entering such a meeting. In fact, it gave the police power to decide who might attend and even who might speak at union meetings!

The proclamation stressed that it was immaterial whether or not evidence established that 'restoration of industrial peace was likely to be prejudiced' by any given act or statement. Any member of the police had only to form an opinion that industrial peace might be so prejudiced. That would be sufficient evidence for conviction. The legislation provided for a penalty of £100 fine or six months in gaol - or both.

The new legislation angered all sections of the Australian Trade Union movement. It met with criticism throughout the nation, with hostility from organizations of the Australian Trade Union movement and with the calm but unshakeable opposition of the people of Mt. Isa.

In the face of provocations, and despite the special police reinforcements flown into their town, the people of Mt. Isa held the biggest mass meeting in the history of the town. Within hours of the proclamation the strikers had painted the town from one end to the other with hundreds of large swastikas. This was their comment on the Government's action.

In Mt. Isa, in Queensland and in Australia generally, workers initiated action and protest against the Emergency Regulations. Within hours, mass walkouts took place at power stations and collieries.

The decisive blow in the defeat of the plans of the Queensland Government was the decision of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council, supported by large sections of workers throughout Australia, to hold a state-wide 24 hour protest stoppage of work.

Spontaneous actions by many sections of workers in other states rapidly developed in support of the call by the Queensland Trades and Labour Council. Resolutions in all states were carried calling for a nationwide 24 hour stoppage.

The government realized it had bitten off more than it could chew. With the movement against it growing rapidly day by day, and the immediate threat of a general strike, the government suspended its own Order-in-Council on February 1st.

The legislation had lasted exactly 5 days!

A week later the Queensland cabinet decided to take no further action in the dispute.

'42 BANNED FOR EVER' AT MT ISA

Forty-two men have been "refused work for all time" by Mt Isa Mines, the Mt Isa Labor Council secretary, Mr B. Foot, said yesterday. "They comprise 39 married and three single men, with 306 years of service," he added. "The number of children affected is 130."

THE MINERS FIGHT BACK

On February 16, Mt. Isa Mines announced a resumption of working the following day. It offered employment to all who had been on the books on December 14 (Mackie had been sacked on October 23).

Here was a chance for the miners to demonstrate their solidarity. They did. Of the 2,000 odd underground workers, only 28 reported for work. Meanwhile the union operating the underground lifts ordered its members to stop work. The 28 scabs never actually got to the face.

During the next week tension mounted in the town as a handful of blacklegs trickled back to work.

The mounting tension was spotlighted by the tragedy of February 22, when 15 year old Bernard Kelly was accidentally shot dead in his Mt. Isa house. Kelly and two other boys were playing with a .303 rifle, normally left unloaded, but now loaded as a result of the trouble in the town.

The accident was seized on by sections of the press as a stick with which to further attack the miners. The press gleefully reported the understandably hysterical abuse the boy's mother hurled at Pat Mackie, as he stood by the picket line, next morning.

Mt. Isa Trades and Labour Council paid all expenses as the largest funeral Mt. Isa had seen drove through the streets on February 25. On this particular day the number of underground workers reporting for duty had grown to 33.

On February 25 the A.W.U. discontinued strike pay. Three days later the Queensland Trades and Labour Council pledged strike pay to all who had been cut off by the A.W.U. (13)

The A.W.U. had only begun payments on December 15. Even so, only 548 of the 2000 odd miners received any benefits. It is estimated the A.W.U. had paid out some £25,000.

We cannot overstress the vital role played by the Queensland Trades and Labour Council in sending delegates throughout the country to tell workers the real issues at stake in Mt. Isa and to raise funds. As the campaign got under way the cash poured into Mt. Isa. Dockers gave £2,000 weekly. Broken Hill miners each gave 7/6 a week.

Collections spread into New Zealand. Support even came from mine and smelter workers in the USA.

All this money was collected and distributed by the Trades Council. (When the A.W.U. had been paying benefits, the T & L.C. made up the amounts to their own rates!)

As an example of what this entailed, take the week ending 6/3/65. During this week they paid out £8,038. Each of 429 married couples received £9.10.0. In addition for each of 1679 children they paid £1.10.0. 274 single men each received £6.

At the same time the miners themselves were busy sending their delegates far afield (Pat Mackie himself covered much of Australia). Special mention must also be made of the 'women's auxiliary'. Mrs Olive Gates, wife of an underground driller, spoke to a packed meeting of Tallawarra power station workers in New South Wales. The men called for a one-day national strike 'to bring the Mt. Isa dispute to a head'. Forbidden by management to collect on the job, the power workers finished up a quarter of an hour early to enable a 5/- levy to be collected.

On February 28, the Committee for Membership Control added an additional demand to those already listed: the removal of the men working in the mine.

The class enemy decided on new tactics. A crudely faked document was circulated in an unsuccessful attempt to break the unity of the miners. The anonymous circular falsely stated that the Mt. Isa Trades and Labour Council Dispute Committee had decided on a return to work by all miners.

(13) As in this country unemployment benefit had been refused, in spite of the men being 'locked out' and not on strike.

Those who applied received refusal notices worded: 'Your application has been carefully examined but approval cannot be given for the following reason '.....' Typed in the gap were the words: 'You do not comply with the conditions of eligibility for unemployment benefit'.

A 'Commonwealth Employment Service' was set up in Australia under the Re-establishment of Employment Act 1945-1959. Its functions are similar to those of the British Labour Exchange. One of them is the administration of unemployment benefits provided under Social Services Act 1947-1963.

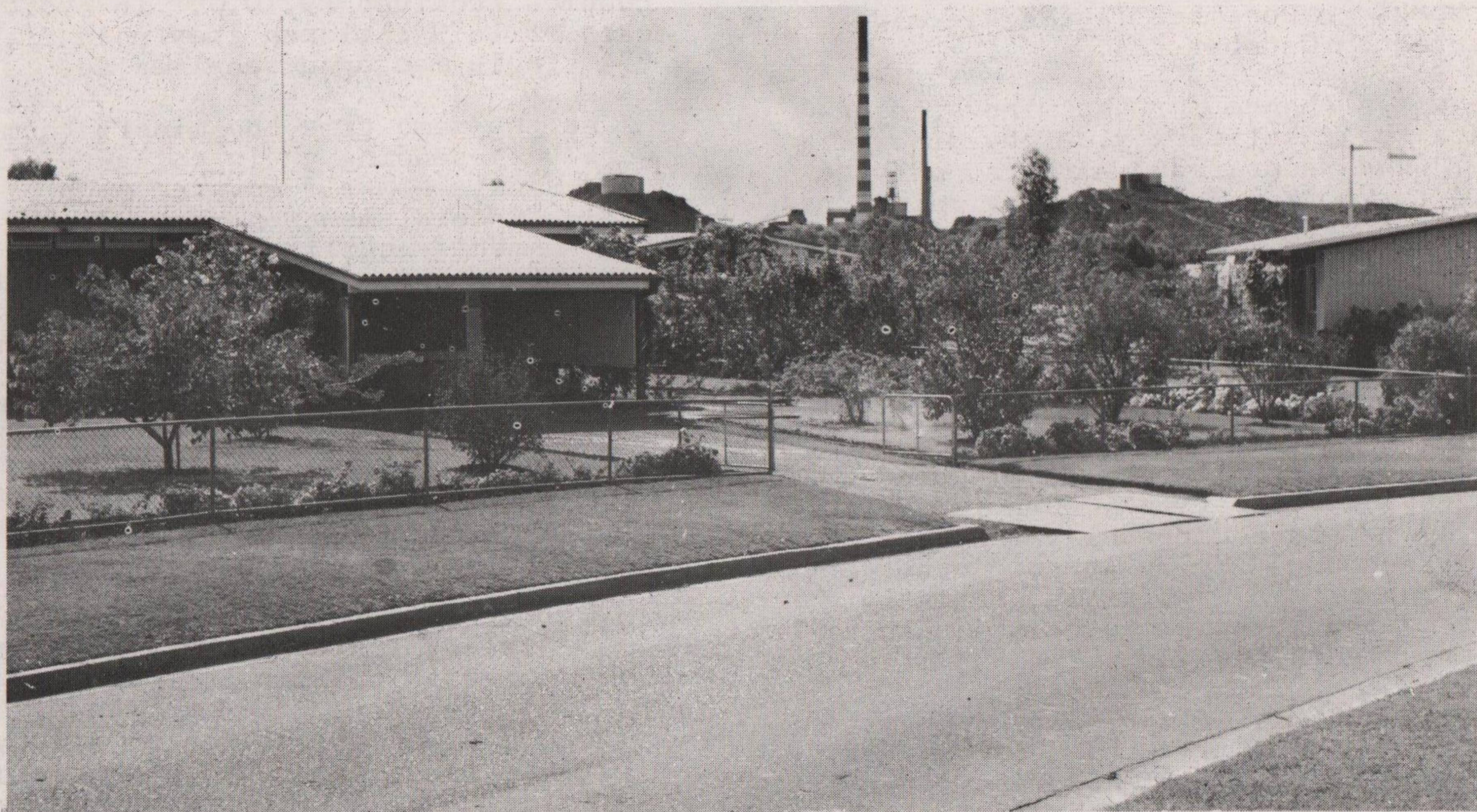
See 'Year Book of Commonwealth of Australia, No. 50, p. 429

Addressed to members of the CMC the document said: 'Our undisputed leader, Pat Mackie, has lost his appeal against his dismissal by Mt. Isa Mines Ltd until we return to work... Get Mackie's appeal heard by going back to work tomorrow, and get him reinstated'.

Pat Mackie had, meanwhile, resigned as secretary of the CMC. In a press statement he pointed out that this was because of the principle of rotating leadership, and also

because he still had plenty of important work to do.

When the CMC was firmly established in Mt. Isa he would organize it throughout the state. 'The CMC has a branch at Mount Morgan already, and I will organize it in the sugar industry in Queensland' he said. He called for greater unity, and said the town must be 'closed' as is Broken Hill. (From 'Australian', 1/3/65).



KNOW YOUR ENEMIES

On March 5, in Parliament, Premier Nicklin defended his government against an opposition vote of no confidence. He made a bitter personal attack on Mackie.

'Vicious gangsters unfit to mingle with decent society had moved into Mt. Isa' he declared. 'These gangsters are not our people, yet they are ruining the lives not only of the men and women but also of the children of what was once Australia's most thriving town'. (Daily Telegraph, 5/3/65).

Other 'points' made by the Government spokesman were that Mackie was a 'convicted thief, a false pretender, a dope-peddler, a gunman and a gangster'. (Sydney Morning Herald, 5/3/65). Nicklin added that 'This strike in fact is the pattern of communist strategy (14) in other fields: to retard, and even prevent, major developmental projects in this state'. (Daily Telegraph, 5/3/65).

Premier's attack

Gangsters 'ruining Isa mines'

BRISBANE, Thurs.—Vicious gangsters unfit to mingle with decent society had moved into Mt. Isa, the Queensland Premier (Mr. Nicklin) said today.

"These gangsters are not our people, yet they are ruining the lives not only of the men and women but also of the children of what was once Australia's most thriving town," he said.

The debate lasted for 16 hours. The filth and abuse never ceased pouring from the mouths of the government supporters. Needless to say the real issues at Mt. Isa were not even mentioned.

Three days later, on March 3, the State government extended the State of Emergency for a further 3 months.

It is one of the axiomatic beliefs of the 'traditional left' that Labour Parties and trade union leaders somehow 'represent' the working class. But at this stage of the struggle even those born blind could hardly fail to see the alignment of forces at Mt. Isa or various other aspects of the modern bureaucratic capitalist state. The miners saw the reality staring them in the face. They aptly summed up the situation in their newsletter of March 10, entitled 'ISA TRUTHS'. We reproduce it in full:

(14) As might be expected, despite numerous promises to produce 'evidence' of active communists in Mt. Isa, the combined forces of state and union bureaucracy were unable to unearth a single 'communist' employed at Mt. Isa.



ISA TRUTHS

The past three weeks in Mount Isa has witnessed the most fantastic events in the history of Australian Trade Unionism. They are as follows:

1. A huge foreign owned company, namely Mount Isa Mines Limited, has openly requested SCABS to offer for employment with it, and this offer has been made with the concurrence and connivance of Australia's largest union the A.W.U.
2. Since the date the gates were opened, i. e. the 17th February, 1965, the SCABS have been encouraged, cajoled and even pushed back to work by the executive of their own Union, namely the same A.W.U.
3. At no time since the gates were opened has the A.W.U. requested its rank and file members to express their attitude to the offer of Mount Isa Mines Limited to return to work.
4. The executive of the A.W.U. has since the 17th February, 1965, repeatedly published propaganda directed at its OWN members to SCAB on their workmates by returning to work without knowing or requesting the attitude of the other Unionists who were locked out on the 15th December, 1964.
5. It is abundantly clear that both Mount Isa Mines Limited and the Executive of the A.W.U. are aware that almost every Unionist in Mount Isa is not prepared to return to work until their demands have been met or at least arbitrated on in a proper and legitimate manner.
6. This 'unholy alliance' between Mount Isa Mines Limited and the Executive of the A.W.U. has its genesis in the attempt by a right wing Union executive operating in an undemocratic and autocratic manner to control the industrial rights of 4000 Mine employees of a foreign controlled company.
7. BOTH Mount Isa Mines Limited and the Executive of the A.W.U. might well be reminded of the following facts, all of which must be remedied sooner or later:
 - (a) a miner is not an unskilled and nomadic worker such as are many Cane cutters and Shearers and as such is prepared to fight for his industrial rights and thereby requires a militant Union Executive, for which the A.W.U. as at present constituted is completely unfitted.
 - (b) Miners at Mount Isa are no longer prepared to allow their leaders to be dismissed out of hand by Mount Isa Mines Limited and see the Executive of the A.W.U. stand idly by and do nothing - as has occurred in Mount Isa for the past twenty years.
 - (c) Miners at Mount Isa are no longer prepared to be treated like little children in their industrial and working relationships with Mount Isa Mines Limited, such as not being allowed a fair hearing on complaints at work and having to bribe staff members to obtain favourable conditions of employment.
 - (d) Miners at Mount Isa are no longer prepared to allow themselves to be represented by the A.W.U. in its present form, such as executives who are prepared to obtain industrial peace at any cost, to a Union organizer who is not even elected by the men on the field and who knows about as much about mining as the village idiot.
 - (e) Miners at Mount Isa are no longer prepared to allow their Union to stand idly by while they are deprived of their basic industrial rights such as the A.W.U. did in 1961 when the Nicklin-Morris government amended the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act to prevent the bonus being increased but allowed it to be decreased.

ALL sane thinking people throughout Australia must be asking themselves, irrespective of the disgusting and un-Australian propaganda by the Tory press, WHY, WHY, WHY would nearly 4000 men be prepared to sacrifice a weekly wage increase of £3.0.0. (for which Whistler would kill his mother in law) rather than return to work.

ALL sane thinking people throughout Australia must be asking themselves WHY, WHY, WHY is the Executive of the A.W.U. so desperately anxious to get as many of its members back to work at any cost whilst knowing full well they will be scabbing on their mates.

ALL sane thinking people throughout Australia must be asking themselves WHY, WHY, WHY is the State government not prepared to listen to the miners' complaints and force Mount Isa Mines Limited to genuinely confer with the employees on those complaints.

THERE ARE FOUR PARTIES TO THIS DISPUTE. Three on one side, namely the Government, Mount Isa Mines Limited and the Executives of the A.W.U. - and one on the other side: the employees.

Ask yourselves WHY is this so.

WHY, WHY, WHY ?

THE PICKET LINES

The struggle was reaching its last desperate stages. After 5 months of battle the pressures on the men were tremendous, and the daily trickle back to work grew with each passing day. The call for more pickets became more urgent, the conflicts between pickets and scabs sharper. During the evening of March 14 a struggle between members of the CMC and a scab worker resulted in rifle shots echoing around the company-owned barracks.

Following the shooting incident the A.W.U. State president (G. Goding) demanded that the company remove the strikers from the barracks. The Company showed its solidarity with the 'official' A.W.U. by immediately ordering the 20 strikers living in the barracks to be 'out' by 7.30 pm. the same day!

The picketing was stepped up. On March 15 they numbered 250 - men, women and children. Three men who sat in the road to block traffic entering the mine were removed by police 'for their own protection'.

The length to which the trade union bureaucrats were prepared to go were now revealed. The Federal President of the A.W.U. (E. Williams) demanded extra police protection for miners returning to work. In answer to his call the State Cabinet decided to send the Queensland Police Commissioner (F.E. Bischof) to the strike-torn town to carry out an on-the-spot survey of police requirements.

On March 16 Bischof, supported by 21 special police from Brisbane (in addition to the usual Mt. Isa quota) joined the pickets at the mine gates. Pickets numbered 220. Questioned by the press, Bischof claimed that none of the pickets had broken the law, and none had caused intimidation. (15)

A.W.U. State President (G. Goding) had his own ideas about the right of workers in dispute to organize picketing. 'The Government must be more forceful and ban picketing altogether' he proclaimed. 'A lot of unionists want to go back to the mines but are intimidated by pickets' he said.

On March 17, Goding's dreams came true. The State government rushed through an 'Anti-Picketing Law'. The new legislation

- (1) forbade all forms of picketing at or near Mt. Isa.
- (2) prevented anyone visiting a worker at his home to discuss the conditions of employment at Mt. Isa.
- (3) gave unlimited powers of arrest without warrant to police officers.
- (4) provided that where two or more persons were present in a road, land, building, premises or place, they may be ordered by the police to disperse.
- (5) provided for police to interfere in a person's own home if this was considered necessary to ensure the person would not offend against the act.

To enforce the new measures an additional 20 police were flown in. The number now serving under Bischof's direct control was over 70.

Rushing the Act through in a single sitting, Nicklin had argued it was essential in order to counter massive intimidation by pickets. Yet only the previous day his henchman, Police Commissioner Bischof, was quoted in the Mt. Isa Mail as saying:

'... our concern is the upholding of law which has so far been fairly well observed by people manning picket lines...'

On the first morning after the new legislation became law, pickets turned up in force - about 220 of them. Police ordered them to move back. Four people were arrested for refusing to 'move on'.

The next day the police were out bright and early. They formed a cordon across the dry bed of the Leichhard River, which separates the 'town' from the 'mine'. A few women attempted to cross the road, but were stopped by the police. Although they claimed to be on their way to church, they were herded back across the road by the police. One woman was arrested. When her husband protested at the way she was being handled, he was arrested too. The pickets were moved two blocks away by the police. They walked slowly, singing 'We Shall Overcome'.

The anti-picketing legislation had an impact far beyond Mt. Isa. The Queensland Trades and Labour Council met to discuss a state-wide 24 hour strike. The A.W.U. and the Queensland Employers Federation joined hands urging unionists not to participate in the stoppage.

(15) See 'Australian', 17.3.65.

THE END

The new legislation, the propaganda and rumours spread by the employers (deliberately false reports of the number of blacklegs constantly appeared in the press), and the general tiredness growing among many of the workers, were all slowly being reflected in the numbers who trickled back to work.

On March 22, delegates from 38 unions met to determine the date of the proposed State stoppage. But that same week Mt. Isa Mines were able to resume operations - after 101 days of absolutely no production. To ensure continuity of operations the Company needed 400 men, and these they had now got.

On March 28 Pat Mackie advised the men to return to work. His recommendation came as a bombshell to many of his supporters. But, under the circumstances, he saw no alternative. An attempt had been made to have copper declared 'black' by the dockers but the suggestion had been rejected by the watersiders' Federation.

Mackie agreed that the strikers could stay out for another year if they chose. All that it would mean would be that the mine would continue working with less militant workers. Mackie declared that he had no intention of applying for reinstatement. There was nothing particularly wonderful about being employed by Mt. Isa Mines, but a vital trade union principle had been at stake.

A few days later Pat Mackie left Mt. Isa. The majority of the CMC members had been prepared to carry on the fight, but the 'strike is over' statement from Mackie finished off the process of disillusionment. Forty two CMC members were 'blacklisted' by Mt. Isa Mines 'for all time'. In Sydney, Pat Mackie announced that his ambition was to win a seat in the Queensland House of Representatives! (16)

On April 7, 226 days after it began, the Mt. Isa dispute was over. A mass meeting of craft unionists voted by a 3-1 majority to return to work the following day.

(16) 'The Australian', 5.4.65.

AWU CHIEF URGES BAN ON PICKETING

BRISBANE, Tues. — The Mt. Isa Mines dispute would crumble within two weeks if picketing were prevented, the Queensland president of the AWU (Mr. Goding) said tonight.

"Intimidation at Isa"

MR. GODING called for State Government action to abolish picketing outside the Mt. Isa Mines. He said: "The Government must be more forceful and ban picketing altogether. town would go back to work this week. They said this would explain the increase on picketing this week."

BRISBANE, Monday. — State Cabinet decided today to prevent any further "intimidatory" picketing of the Mt. Isa mine.

It sent the Queensland Police Commissioner, Mr F. E. Bischof to the strike-torn town today with orders to survey the situation and recommend what action should be taken.

Announcing these developments the premier, Mr Nicklin, said Cabinet had decided that "intimidatory aspects of picketing which were prevalent at the mine today will not be allowed tomorrow."

A strong call for more police protection for Mt. Isa Mines workers was made later by the A.W.U. state secretary and federal president, Mr E. Williams.

SOME LESSONS

The Mount Isa struggle will certainly be remembered as one of the greatest in working class history. Both its general pattern and its detailed episodes highlight the reality of class relations today. They compel all serious revolutionaries to take stock of the world around them and ruthlessly to draw the necessary conclusions, even if these clash with some long-established, hallowed and cherished beliefs.

The demystification of revolutionaries is today one of the essential prerequisites of any meaningful struggle. The old slogan 'without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary practice' may provide the walls of an intellectual prison. It may be an obstacle to action if the 'theory' referred to is in conflict with the new reality. 'Without the development of revolutionary theory there can be no development of revolutionary action' is an idea far more in keeping with the requirements of today.

Let us take a look at the Australian ruling class, at the Australian trade union bureaucracy and at the Australian workers, in the light of these concepts.

During the Mount Isa dispute the Australian ruling class revealed the brutality, ruthlessness and contempt for the 'legality' of its own actions which all ruling classes in history have shown, when faced with serious threats to their privileges and power.

Nicklin's 'Order in Council' of January 22, 1965, the rushing through of the 'Anti-Picketing Law' on March 17, 1965 and the blank cheque issued to the police to implement these rulings show that violence is still the ultimate custodian of our rulers' 'right' to rule. Nicklin's vicious personal attack on Pat Mackie from his privileged position in Parliament, echoed by papers throughout the country ('just reporting') show how unscrupulously they will use every medium at their disposal.

The whole nexus of connections between business interests and state legislatures, between state legislature and industrial commissions and courts of various kinds, between 'arbitrators' and judges, between judges and police officials, between the press and Capital, were all laid bare. Modern

ruling classes do not like to indulge in this kind of political 'strip-tease'. They do not like to show ordinary people the fist lying concealed in the velvet glove. This understandable reluctance constantly fosters reformist and pacifist illusions among those seeking to change society. Events such as the Mt. Isa struggle help document what we are really up against.

During the Mount Isa struggle the trade union bureaucracy was also revealed in its true colours. It is here that traditional 'left' mythology dies hardest.

What does it really mean when officials of the A.W.U. conspire with the management to lose Mackie his job? What does it mean when they strive to get the men back on contract work, sweating their guts out competing with one another? What does it mean when a union leadership does everything in its power to break the resistance to the employing class of those it allegedly 'represents'? What does it mean when union leaders openly act hand in hand with the management, ensuring that workers lose their inadequate accommodation, ensuring that scabs are provided with 'adequate' police protection, calling on a capitalist government 'to be more forceful and ban picketing altogether'?

Read again the leaflet 'Isa Truths' published on p. 14. The miners of Mount Isa ask some pretty pertinent questions. Their anguished 'WHY?' must not remain unanswered. These are not rhetorical questions. It is time some blunt and systematic answers were given to them.

The union bureaucracy, today, is no longer a 'distorted reflection' of working class interests and aspirations, capable of being 'reformed' or 'pressurized' or 'manoeuvred' either out of existence or into being something else. It is an autonomous social formation with social interests of its own, of which it is acutely conscious. It has repeatedly shown itself prepared both to defend and to extend these interests.

Today this bureaucracy plays a very definite role in production. It seeks to establish itself as the recognized and institutionalized management of the labour process, as the unquestioned traders in the collective labour power of working people. To achieve this end, the bureaucracy must gradually and systematically integrate the workers into their assigned, subordinate place in the great modern edifice of bureaucratic capitalism. It must extend its tentacles into every unit or place of work. It must destroy all manifestations of working class autonomy, all those minor degrees of control of the

work process, often won by the workers through bitter struggles in the past. The record is there for anyone with eyes to see. The bureaucracy increasingly tends to barter these basic rights away, in exchange for small wage increases which modern capitalism can not only afford but which are essential for the further expansion of capital, in the era of the mass market.

To secure its position the bureaucracy must increasingly seek to free itself of all control from below. It must seek to increase its status and the salaries of its members and will strenuously resist any attempt to link these to the wages of those it allegedly 'represents'. Union officials will seek to increase their tenure of office, submitting to 're-election' as seldom as they can decently get away with. They will seek to increase the number of appointed functionaries at the expense of elected ones. They will exert increasing control over union journals and develop increasing skill in the manipulation of union conferences. They will seek to prevent 'horizontal' communication between one union branch and another, claiming that such communication should only be through the established hierarchical organization of the union itself. (17)

They will seek to curb the power and authority of shop floor organizations, recognizing them as genuine expressions of working class interests and therefore as potential rivals. The trade union bureaucracy today 'represents' the workers about as much as a 'screw' represents the prisoners.

If this analysis of the trade union bureaucracy is correct certain obvious conclusions should be drawn. Revolutionaries should cease strengthening the organizational and ideological grip of the bureaucracy, and then moaning and groaning when it acts as it does. They should cease being obsessed by the mystique of the 'official' dispute and turn their attention to disputes controlled by the men themselves. They should remember the conclusion of the Mt. Isa miners, namely that there are four parties to every dispute, three on one side (employer, government and union officials) - and one on the other (the workers themselves).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Have I sent off my subscription to
SOLIDARITY,?

197 Kings Cross Road, London W.C.1.
(10/- for 12 issues, post free).

Finally the Mount Isa dispute throws an important light on the working class itself. Its power, its tenacity, its grim humour, its solidarity - and the failings of this great dispute are those of the working class itself.

Of the first few ingredients, this pamphlet bears eloquent testimony. If we concentrate on the last, it is because it is here that the main effort still has to be made.

The main weaknesses, in our opinion, were:

- (1) the lack of large, effective rank-and-file bodies, with their roots firmly implanted in other industries. The miners could not win in isolation. The attempts made to get solidarity action from railwaymen and dockers could only have been successful if there had been such rank-and-file bodies established in these sections. It was futile to appeal to their 'leaders' for support.
- (2) While the collection of money, the passing of resolutions of support, and the sending out of speakers to address meetings are essential, they are no substitute for solidarity action. All the demands of the various meetings of support were aimed at Parliament. The call to 'nationalize the Mt. Isa Mines' dominated all the propaganda. This was nothing more than an open call for Nicklin and Menzies to take over control of the industry - neither a step towards socialism and workers' management, nor a step towards the solution of the immediate grievance of the miners!
- (3) Throughout the strike the militant miners were proud of their 'legality'. They refused to break with the A.W.U. While 'protesting' at Nicklin's vicious laws, they never suggested that these laws should be openly defied or challenged. Deep down the workers still saw 'the law' as something sacrosanct, as something 'above society'. They didn't grasp the class character of the state and of its laws. They didn't realize that you can't wage a successful large scale struggle - or eventually have a revolution - without breaking a few laws. It was by no means accidental that one of Pat Mackie's last statements was to express a desire to be an MP.

(17) It is interesting that an exactly similar conception prevails in the internal organization of sundry Stalinist, Trotskyist and Leninist groups, believing in 'democratic centralism'.

THE MOUNT ISA STORY

PAT MACKIE

In its issue of August 1965, the journal Overland published a short article by Pat Mackie called 'The Mount Isa Story'. The article deals with what the paper's editor called 'the most serious single outburst of industrial unrest in Australia in the last 15 years'. We are pleased to publish the following extracts.

While the nation's press gleefully and no doubt dutifully reports that the Mt. Isa 'strike' is over and that the mine workers are whistling their way home with much enlarged pay packets, a true picture would portray Mt. Isa as nothing other than a forced labor camp. Sullen and morose workers, driven back to work on the Company's terms by the Nicklin Government's police state legislation, are far from whistling. They are seething with rage and resentment as evidence reveals the bitter truth that only a few of the original contract miners are henceforth to be permitted to work on contract. This means, for the majority, a resultant cut of more than fifty per cent. in take home pay.

Working conditions have worsened in more ways than one. Young and inexperienced shift-bosses and foremen have been given freedom to handle their men just how they please and are hastening to impress on the workers their supreme power. Threats of dismissal, victimisation and pin-pricking attitudes are the order of the day. Experienced miners are pushed into menial jobs, to keep them reminded of the boss's displeasure, caused by the eight-months long solid stand taken by the employees in their struggle for wage justice. Contract work is now available only to those who signify by their subservience that they have learned their lesson and will not take part in any future work stoppages.

As a chastisement, most contract miners are kept on wages which amount to a mere £3.10.2 a day. The £8 a week bonus and the newlywon £3 a week 'prosperity loading' bring the daily wages to a princely £5.14.2 for stumbling around in the bowels of the earth, choking on impure air and staggering under the burden of heavy work in extreme temperatures. Before the 1961 lock-out contract miners were able to make from £8 to £12 a day, but since their loss in that dispute the Mt. Isa Mines Company has relentlessly whittled away at contract prices so that, immediately

prior to the 1964 dispute the same miners were flat out to make £6.10.0 a day plus the £1.12.0 bonus. Many and varied are the devices of this rapacious employer to show the workers who has the upper hand. The most meagre petty amenities have been withdrawn and all dealings with employees are now measured on a 'since the dispute' basis.

The refusal to allow men to return to contract work is the worst form of victimisation imposed by the Company, in view of the fact that Mt. Isa's cost of living is one of the highest in Australia. Exorbitant rents (ten guineas and upwards for sub-standard unfurnished shacks, with outside toilets and prehistoric washing and bathing facilities), together with all sorts of hire purchase commitments undertaken by the workers when they were making enough money to afford those millstones, keep most Mt. Isa people constantly struggling to remain abreast of economic encumbrances. One might go on and give a comparative list of food prices, but suffice it to point out that the weary heartless old lettuce, costing 3/- and more, is a luxury item. 'Who eats lettuce anyway?'

Despite the crowing of Company spokesmen, the Mt. Isa labor picture is far from healthy and another industrial upheaval must erupt, just as soon as the miners get their breath back, after warding off the wolves of their immediate economic commitments. The pre-1961 contract rates were low enough, even in the opinion of the Brisbane Courier Mail, which said of Mt. Isa: 'It is a Company mining town, similar to thousands of company mining towns all over the world, smoke stack and slag heap dominating a township of shabby houses, unspeakable hotels and inordinately expensive shops. Toss in Mt. Isa's individual distinctions - a wretched summer, fearsome insect plagues, and great isolation - and it stands forth as a black prince among mining towns'..

Those who live in homes which they bought from the Company (average cost about £4,500, but more nearly £9,000 when interest and charges are met) pay off the price at an average rent of £4.10.0 to £5.10.0 a week, plus £65 annual rates. During the dispute rents could not be paid, so workers are now obliged to make up the extra payments. With all these burdens the situation is that Mt. Isa workers are living in economic slavery. If the workers inside the gates do not bend to the Company's vicious discipline they are reminded of the 39 married men still outside the gates, so they knuckle down and remember that the great white master, with Government patronage, has the whips well and truly in hand.

Many persons may ask 'Why, if conditions are so bad in Mt. Isa do people stay on there?'. The answer is that they are forced to stay against their will. The majority of people left in the town are old-timers who decided years ago to settle down there and raise their children. They did not foresee the new trends, either in mining operations or in the Company's attitude towards its employees. As well as being tied by growing families and being caught up in the net of hire purchase payments, in most cases they have Company-built homes half paid for. To sell a home in Mt. Isa at any time poses enough of a problem but under present conditions it is virtually impossible. Homes purchased from the Company are real hot potatoes. They cannot be let by the buyer and they can be sold only to a person approved by the Company. With the air of uncertainty presently enveloping Mt. Isa, nobody in his right mind would consider buying himself into a similar dilemma with a Company home.

'But', some people may say, 'I read that they are making good money at Mt. Isa'. The anti-worker Courier Mail, through its Mt. Isa based reporter, has indeed claimed that contented workers at Mt. Isa are now earning huge pay cheques under the 'new' contract system. What happened was that, when work resumed on a limited scale, the Company hand-picked a special stooge element, employed these men on a few contracts with prices well above the previous level, and in places where, because of the easy breaking nature of the ground, the most inexperienced miner could not help but make good money. The Company then saw to it that their good ally, the Courier Mail, made much publicity about such well-filled 'Demo' model pay envelopes.

There were two reasons for this action. First, it made the right type of reading in the anti-worker press for the miners' enemies, and secondly it was good 'P.R.' for the Company in snaring a complete new work force, for some years a cherished dream of the management of Mt. Isa Mines, whose Wall

Street owners work on the common American assumption that old employees get too hard in the head and know too much about bargaining for their rights under the contract system. A new bunch of faces every year or so is what outfits like Mt. Isa Mines desire. Production continues to rise despite a 52 per cent. annual labor turnover. With new men, who do not have the benefit of long years of horse-trading experience with their foremen, it is an easy matter for the Company's minions to trim off a sizeable chunk of the annual wages bill - an ability in their staff not exactly frowned on by M.I.M. directors...

THE GREAT CONSPIRACY?

It is more than feasible that the entire Mt. Isa dispute was a planned conspiracy. In it, I believe, the Wall Street owners of Mt. Isa Mines, assisted by the Nicklin Government and its farcical Industrial Courts, perpetrated the greatest confidence trick of this decade upon the Australian public - and all condoned by 'Dollars-for-Diggers' Menzies. Thanks, pre-eminently, to the aid given them by (or bought from them) the Government and the nation's press, the American Smelting and Refining Corporation were enabled to pull the wool over the public's eyes while the Guggenheim crew of Wall Street plucked millions in extra profits from the pockets of Australian taxpayers. During the dispute the price of copper soared to over £650 a ton, compared with £326 a ton before the trouble! The Nicklin Government, many of whose members are shareholders in the fabulously rich Mt. Isa Mines, must be considered a guilty partner in the trickery, since it made no genuine effort to compel the Company to negotiate in a decent manner with its employees. Throughout a dozen 'compulsory conferences' Company officials maintained an arrogant, intransigent stand. Their attitude throughout the entire dispute showed that they were in fact desirous of prolonging the stoppage...

To assist in the conspiracy, and throw the unsuspecting public off the scent of the truth, newspaper editors leaned over backwards to portray the Mt. Isa struggle as a communist-inspired strike run by gangsters and stand-over men. In order to bring the Mt. Isa workers into disrepute, they singled out one individual as the target for a lying campaign of character assassination. Pat Mackie who was the first to be sacked and victimised by the Company because he emerged as one of the leaders, became the object of a ruthless, unrelenting,

indeed unparalleled smear attack by the press (and by many of the Queensland churches). When it became apparent that the Australian trade union movement was not going to stand idly by while a union representative was being victimised, the attack became more intense. Politicians, from the haven of their cowards' castle, spewed forth great streams of vilification...

The press persisted in labelling the Mt. Isa affair a 'strike' though in fact it was a lockout. The workers at Mt. Isa were at no time on strike. They continued to report for work but refused to work on a contract basis. This action was a mild and perfectly legal form of protest, within the confines of their union award, which gave them the explicit right to work either on contract or on wages. An attempt by the Company to have the action labelled as 'go-slow strike' was not sustained by a three-man commission who subsequently voted two to one against declaring it a strike. The regrettable fact that the president of the Industrial Court, when appealed to by the Company, saw fit to reverse the commission decision, and gave an opinion that the dispute was a 'go-slow strike' merely goes to show the depths to which even judges may sink in the service of foreign cartels.*

A GREAT CONFIDENCE TRICK

And why did Mt. Isa Mines Company allow the re-employment of Pat Mackie to become an issue while the nation was losing over £1 million a week? Would it not have been cheaper to send Mackie off to Tahiti on a salary of ten thousand pounds a year to look after their agency there? Or could they not have put him back to work in some nasty forgotten corner of the mines and so provoked him into leaving voluntarily? The Australian economy may have lost over £36 million through the Mt. Isa stoppage, but the owners of Mt. Isa Mines, the American Smelting and Refining Corporation, made more profits while the gates were closed than when they were open. Sir Robert Menzies and Mr. Nicklin knew of these facts but were not in the least perturbed. In face of such damage to the Australian economy, should not either of them have ordered the Company to re-employ Mackie? Since they did not one may well conclude that they were quite aware of the conspiracy.

I conclude by quoting passages of a letter sent to Mr. Nicklin by the Queensland Trades and Labor Council which states: 'Recently we sought the assistance of Mr. R. G. Palmer, Senior Lecturer in Economic Statistics at the University of Queensland, and that gentleman has undertaken considerable research into various aspects of the dispute. For your consideration we set out hereunder certain information and opinions based upon Mr. Palmer's researches and advices to us. Our basic contention is that the full significance of the situation at Mt. Isa cannot be understood if attention is focussed solely on events in that town or elsewhere in Australia. A careful appraisal of a number of matters involving international markets and other countries must also be undertaken. Such an appraisal may be of special importance in explaining the remarkable reluctance of Mt. Isa Mines Ltd. to enter into negotiations with its employees during the course of the dispute. In the first place a majority of shares (approximately 54%) in Mt. Isa Mines Ltd. is held by an overseas corporation 'The American Smelting and Refining Corporation'. This company has large copper producing mines in the United States and Peru and is closely associated with other American mining companies having substantial copper mining activities in North and South America. Mt. Isa Mines is a very important investment for this company and it has been estimated (see Nation, February 6, 1965) that 45% of its income is derived from its Australian subsidiary. Secondly it should be borne in mind that to a large extent world copper prices and production policies are determined by agreement between the major copper producing companies of the world. The great influence of the world copper cartel is illustrated by the fact that between July 1961 and January 1964 copper producers, by restricting sales and production, were able to ensure that the price of copper was maintained constant at £236 sterling a ton in spite of wide fluctuations in demand and supply conditions, and the existence of considerable over-capacity in the industry.

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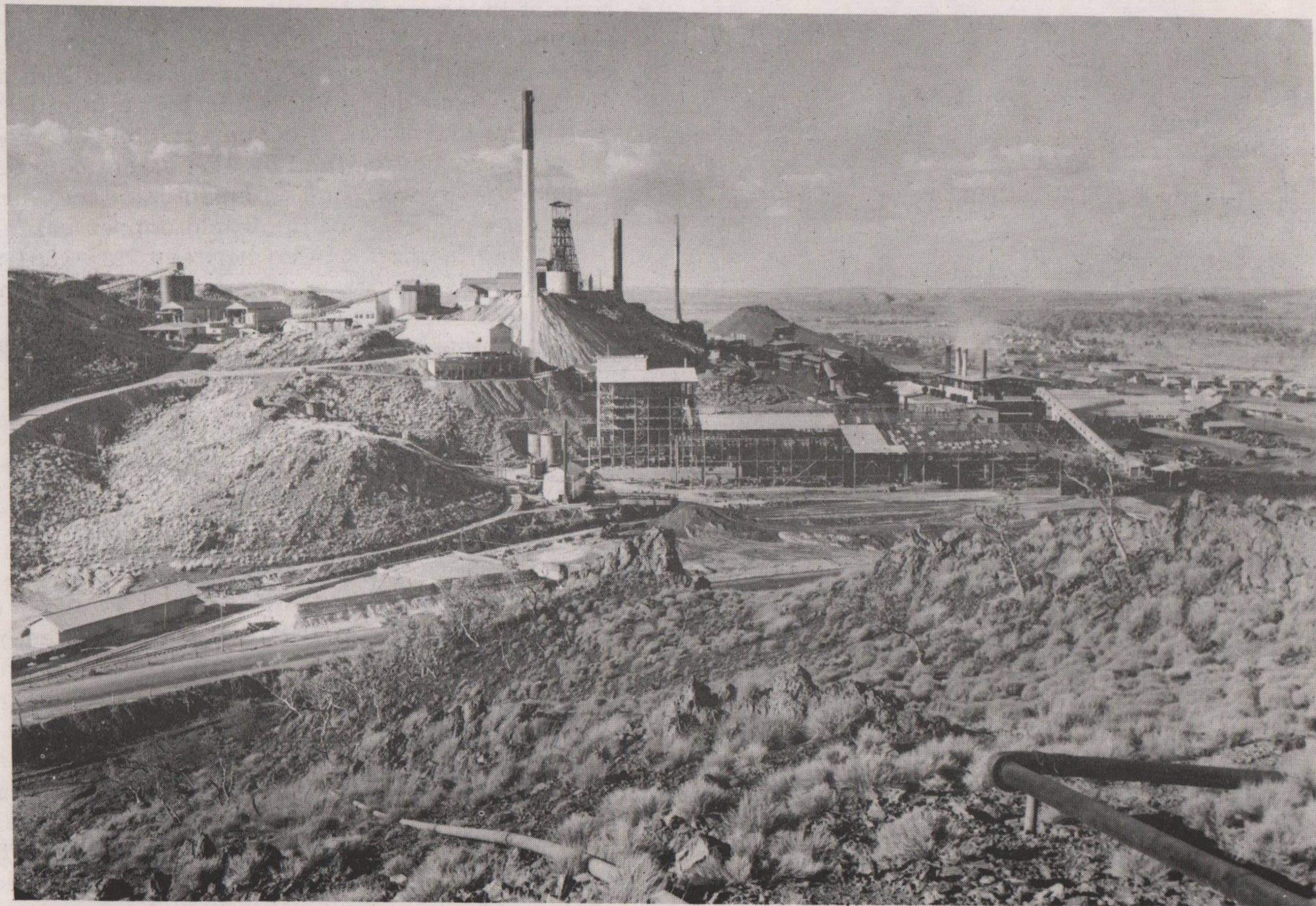
These rather naive lines illustrate the grip - even on such genuine rank and file militants as Pat Mackie - of the reformist and nationalist ideas peddled by Communist parties in every country of the world. The fact that the President of the Industrial Court reversed the Commission's decision can only appear a 'regrettable fact' to those who don't understand the social function of such Courts. That surprise should be shown at the fact that 'even judges' may act in the interests of Capital just shows a blissful unawareness as to the nature of 'justice' in a class society. As for the influence of 'foreign cartels' does the author really think that things would have been very different had the particular capitalist been Australian rather than American? (Ed. Solidarity)

'It is evident therefore that the actions of the local management of Mt. Isa Mines Ltd. must be heavily influenced by the world copper market and the international copper producers' cartel along with the directives and interests of the American 'parent' company. It is well known to economists that any group of producers acting in concert can achieve a position of profit maximisation by restricting sales and thereby achieving higher prices than would emerge in a purely competitive situation. Various means of restricting sales may be used. Production may be continued at the same level but some of the supplies are withheld from the market and stockpiles are built up. Alternatively production may simply be reduced by closing down plant and sacking or laying-off members of the labour force. However, neither of these expedients are likely to be looked upon very favourably by governments, the public or users of the particular commodity. On the other hand if employees can be 'induced' to strike, for example, by a refusal of reasonable wage claims or other means, the companies can achieve the same result and at the same time endeavour to lay the blame at the foot of their employees. By a strange coincidence, at about the same time in mid-1964 when Mt. Isa Mines Ltd's

failure to grant higher bonus payments (in spite of a very greatly increased profit level) had led to the miners' refusal to work on contract, a series of strikes and industrial disputes were also taking place in the largest U.S. copper mines and in the American-owned mines in Chile, over exactly the same issue. What is even more surprising is that a number of commentators on the world copper market several months previously were able to predict that these disputes would take place. Thus the London Economist, a well-informed, though scarcely radical, journal, had stated on April 11, 1964, that the temporary increase in the price of copper reflected in part additional purchases, prompted by the likelihood of strikes, etc., later in the year. It went on to say that "any resultant interruption of supplies would mainly swell the incomes of stockholders and speculators: Rhodesian and other suppliers might also benefit from the price increases so generated."

These extraordinarily prescient observations of the London Economist were made during April 1964. The Mt. Isa miners were refused a reasonable request and 'induced' to take some action on August 24, 1964!

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MACKIE'S DISMISSAL

This week will see a massive 24-hour stoppage of Queensland workers to the new police-state at State Government against trade union and citizenry.

Judge refuses to hear

BRISBANE, Wed. — The Queensland Industrial Court President, Mr Justice Hanger, this morning decided not to hear an appeal by Mt Isa miners' union leader Pat Mackie.

His Honor said he would not hear the appeal in the present circumstances and adjourned Mackie's application indefinitely.

Notorious Character

On Saturday police questioned a man in Mount Isa who distributed pamphlets urging unionists to declare the mine black.

The pamphlet said: "Let the Brisbane boys pussy-foot around with their confidences and conniving. Black the mine." The first train load of 850 tons of

ISA Pat

'Drop dead'

A few days ago I asked a Mt Isa A.W.U. man if he had seen a certain A.W.U. official around the main street during the morning.

The local man replied carefully: "I haven't seen him, I don't know where he is and the only news I ever want to hear about him is that the — has dropped dead."

This internecine war within the A.W.U. has naturally been a prime cause of the prolongation of the strike.

But bitterness is not limited to miners.

Because of trouble on the picket lines, a policeman who has lived in harmony with the family next door for many years now finds himself to speak to the

Even the not spe

Eviction from the company barracks of men who have been living there but who are refusing to go back to work on the company's terms.

Blunt words

Meanwhile, rightwing AWU officials have—

dispute

THE MT. ISA DISPUTE

At a cost of about £35 million, the rest of Australia witnessed the last 100 days with a colorful drama set against a background of enormous wealth in one of the most enervating environments in the world.

The cast was diverse: Mr Mackie, Mr Nicklin, Mr Foots, Mr Williams of the Australian Workers' Union, Mr Egerton, Queensland Trades and Labor Council, and the Police Commissioner, Mr Bischof.

Capitalists and communists, miners and migrants, left and right-wing unionists, ham-fisted politicians pursuing an iron-fisted policy, and in the main character role a man who straddled the strong emotions of the world.

SELECTIVE

Dividend
A meeting of Tallawarra power station employees yesterday called for a national 24-hour strike.

ISA TENSE OVER 6 MORE ARRESTS—STATE STRIKE CALL

Mount Isa was near explosion point last night following the arrest of six more people — one a woman — under the anti-picketing law. Several were made after struggles.

There will be no work at the mine today.

PICKETS SING

Patrick Joseph McMahon, 35, unemployed, was charged with fixing a sign in the Mount Isa hotel reading "Edgar Williams Scab."

Police moved the picket squad through the streets until they were about 1½ miles from the mine gates.

The pickets walked slowly, singing "We Shall Overcome, the hymn of American civil rights workers."

"Solidarity of Mt Isa workers"

Big Mt. Isa Earnings Overseas

BRISBANE, Monday. — Mount Isa Mines Ltd. was Australia's biggest earner of overseas funds, the company's chairman, Mr G. Fisher, said today.

Work Refused to Men at Mt. Isa
BRISBANE, Tuesday. — Mt. Isa Mines Ltd. employees refused to work at an underground mine.

Isa Hopes Dimmer

Official Faces Mt. Isa Crowd

BRISBANE, Wednesday. — The northern district secretary of the Australian Workers' Union, Mr K. Costello, faced a barrage of questions on union decisions at a tense meeting in Mount Isa today.

Mr Costello walked out on to the porch of the A.W.U. building when about 300 people gathered and began slow handclapping.

Mr Pat Mackie, unofficial leader of the striking miners, was in the crowd.

Earlier, dozens of men and women, some carrying children, walked into the A.W.U. office and asked Costello for strike relief.

20 evicted

Twenty of the 40 men living at the barracks have returned to work but the others are still on strike.

After the shooting incident (Mr G. Goding), who is in Mt. Isa, demanded that the company remove the strikers from the barracks.

The general manager (Mr J. W. Foots) said later that the company had ordered the 20 strikers to leave the barracks by 7.30 p.m. today.

He said the instruction staff had the order if they were not carried out. But by 7.30 tonight of the 20 men had

Mt Isa

FAKE REPORT FAILS TO SHAKE MT. ISA MEN

A crudely faked document was circulated in Mt. Isa this week in an unsuccessful attempt to break the unity of the miners in their long struggle against the company, for trade union rights and improved wages and conditions.

Pickets PROTESTS AT POLICE WATCH TOUCHY CROWDS

Local police (Inspector L. We) warned senior members of the committee for membership control — the breakaway group from the A.W.U. — that police would not tolerate trouble in the town.

A meeting of 184 craftsmen and nine unions in the Star management, Mr Goding (AWU State president), in the interests of men to work, demanded strong action to remove strikers from the barracks.

Mr. Egerton, last Saturday called on the Nicklin Government to annul

ing scenes at the mine gates, when 250 men, women and children booed miners going to work.

Pickets made several attempts to stop cars, and three men sat on the road, blocking traffic. Police removed them and prevented them from holding

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The A.W.U. strikers relief

ROWDY ISA PICKETS—POLICE ACT

The Queensland police commissioner, Mr Frank Bischof, flew to Mt. Isa yesterday with orders from the State Cabinet to prevent intimidation.

ension

Mackie

for reinforcements

Govt. bans Isa picketing

BRISBANE, Wed. — State Parliament today rushed through legislation aimed at eliminating intimidation in Mt. Isa.

CALL FOR 24-HOUR

INTERNATIONAL

Facts