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News From New Zealand

Since the 17th of February, 1951, New Zealand has been in the throes of one of the longest and bitterest trade union struggles in New Zealand history, commencing with the lock-out of the waterside workers and the bringing down of the "Waterfront Strike Emergency Regulations" and their amendments of 1951.

The Miners, the Wellington Freezing Workers, the N. Z. Federated Seamens Union, struck as a protest against the Emergency Regulations. The Miners, the Freezing Workers and Seamen had no wage dispute. Out of the 4,800 miners, 4,000 ignored the advice of their National Secretary, F. Crook and the National President, A. Prendville to remain at work. On the 8th of February the employers of the waterfront labor offered fourpence halfpenny an hour wage rise following the Arbitration Court 15% order. At Wellington and New Plymouth, on the 10th of February, watersiders ceased working overtime as a protest against the employers' offer. The workers contended fourpence halfpenny an hour was only 9% on a forty-hour week basis. They claim their ability to work overtime had been included by the employers when computing the wage rise. Employers argued that the rise was exactly in line with the 15% court order.

The employers began dismissing men on the 15th of February for refusing to work overtime. Workers alleged that they had been locked out and stated they were willing to work 40 hours a week. Employers replied that refusal to work overtime is a breach of agreement.

On February 19th the Government issued an ultimatum calling on watersiders to resume normal work including overtime, and place wage claims before the waterfront authority. Failing that, the waterfront Commission would be suspended. The same day the waterside workers saw displayed on the engagement boards a notice to the effect that if the workers were not prepared to work overtime they were not to lift their discs. Meeting of the watersiders at all ports on that day rejected the Government ultimatum. The Government suspended the Waterfront Commission on the 20th February. Watersiders claimed the position as an "open lockout by the employers," a "calculated attack" on trade unionism and the forty-hour week. The Prime Minister, Mr. S. G. Holland, declared a state of national emergency on February 22nd.

EMERGENCY REGULATIONS

The Government issued sweeping emergency regulations February 23rd, giving power to suspend all awards, use members of the armed forces on the waterfront, extend powers of Police, deal with any person who incites or aids continuance of dispute, place all union funds in hands of receiver, etc. Waterfront Strike Notice was issued, ordering watersiders back to work by Monday, February 26th or suffer a "declared Strike" under the regulations.

Meetings of watersiders in all ports on 26th February rejected the Government ultimatum. The 27th February was a day of events. The Government ordered servicemen on to Wellington and Auckland waterfronts in strength. New Zealand coast seamen walked off ships being worked by servicemen. Some Wellington Harbor Board employees were suspended for refusing to assist servicemen. Numerous meetings of Seamen, Drivers, etc. were held. The Trade Union Congress called on the Government to resign. The Federation of Labor affiliations recommended calling of compulsory conference between disputing parties under independent chairmen with right of appeal to further authority. Over 1,000 workers employed on hydro-electric plants in Waikato ceased work. All Waikato underground mines and some West Coast mines were idle. The Amalgamated Society Railway Servants instructed all branches not to handle any material on the waterfront normally handled by watersiders. Freezing workers at Nghauranga, Gear Meat Works, Petone and at several other centres stopped work. The Golden Bay cement works closed down.

The Government deregistered the N. Z. Waterside Workers Union Feb. 28th. The Parliamentary Labor Party called on the Government to arrange a compulsory conference between the parties.

On March 1st receivers moved into the Waterside Workers Union offices throughout the country. Bank accounts amounting to some £20,000 were taken over. The Federation of Labor announced that it has "done everything it could be expected to do, within reason." The Union could only blame itself for its position.

By March 5th all mines in the Greymouth district had come to a standstill.

SECRET BALLOT

The Wellington Drivers Union took a secret ballot as to whether they would drive to and from the waterfront to handle cargo worked by servicemen. It was decided by a majority of 17 not to work with the servicemen. The result of the ballot was published in the morning paper (Dominion) on the 10th of April, the evening paper (Evening Post) carried the news of the deregistration of the Wellington Drivers Union. So much for the secret ballot. The same day the Federated Seamens Union, against the advice of their officials, decided by ballot to accept "no engagement" on any ship.

The foregoing will give some idea of the state of things up to the 10th of April. The Government had used everything in the bag to force the watersiders back to work. Emergency regulations, all the anti-trade union legislation brought down by the Labor Government, with a few embellishments of the present Nationalist Govt. were used. It was made an offense to discuss the emergency regulations at any meeting. The Leader of the opposition, Mr. Walter Nash, was also refused permission to do so. In spite of all this the rank and file of the watersiders, miners, Wellington Freezing workers, and the seamen stood solid. New Waterfront Unions and Drivers Unions have been registered. On two occasions the individual members of the old Waterside Workers Union have been sent cards to fill in if they wished to return to work on the waterfront under the new conditions and Union. Very few took advantage of the offer.

It is difficult to think of anything more the Government could do to batter the watersiders into submission. They have refused to negotiate on any basis that will enable the old watersiders union to return as a National Union. The Government has refused to negotiate with any deputation that includes the old union's National President, H. Barnes and the Secretary, T. Hill. Had the workers been prepared to sacrifice these elected representatives, a settlement might have been brought about. The watersiders' determination to support Barnes and Hill frustrated the Government's desires in that direction. The strong stand of the watersiders rank and file behind Barnes and Hill made the Government's claim that Barnes and Hill were the trouble makers on the