

"Japan Must Drive Ahead"

CESSATION of aggression on the mainland would disrupt the entire structure of Japanese economy geared to war time production. The consequent shocks might lead to open outbreaks at home as the shutdown of factories led to unemployment. As the imperialists see it, there is nothing to do but drive forward and seize large new Chinese territories where the open door can be slammed shut just as it was in Manchuria. In addition the seizure of that territory means the tapping of the raw markets of Mongolia as well as providing an outlet for manufactured goods there.

As a long range project the seizure of this territory will strike a blow at the Soviet Union. Japanese military experts believe that the trade routes give them an open road to the cutting of Siberian connections from European Russia in the vicinity of Lake Baikal and in the last analysis the Japanese fear the Soviet Union more than any other factor. They are determined to provoke conflict despite the Russian peace policy. They want to do it as soon as possible.

All of these war calculations must be balanced against conditions at home and the temper of the Japanese workers and peasants. Recent statistics indicate that there are 2,540,000 workers in concerns employing more than 12 workers. The total number of work-

ers including those engaged in fishing and agriculture is estimated at approximately 5,770,000. Of these only about 380,000 are organized in trade unions. Those in unions of the extreme right include about 20 percent of the number. The unions of the center in which the leadership is committed in advance to any government move comprise 70 percent and the more independent unions number about 10 percent. Unions under revolutionary leadership have been "abolished" and their leaders driven underground.

However, within all of the unions there is a ferment of opposition leadership which demands a positive policy against the decreasing standards of living and positive strike action is on the increase.

Average wages of all workers is close to one yen and 57 sen per day, the rough equivalent of 46 cents. Skilled workers especially those in the favored heavy, i.e. war industries, may earn as much as 7 or 8 yen but the rising costs of foodstuffs operate to the disadvantage of all workers. Hours are long and industrial safeguards at a low level. Even the best paid skilled worker generally finds his earnings insufficient to provide a living for his family and women and children are forced to supplement the earnings in the majority of cases.

The gains in heavy industry not only spell profits; they breed a true proletariat and it is significant that the most independent and

militant workers are to be found here. Any drive toward war must take these things into account and the dissatisfaction attendant on lowered living standards is giving the government some pause. Japan is lush with "patriotic" societies of all kinds, all of them tainted with fascist teachings and all calculated to hold the wavering fervor of the workers in line for conquest.

The crisis through which Japan is passing is the same as that being experienced by other nations under the domination of monopoly capitalism. Her rulers are seeking to escape the nemesis of proletarian revolution through imperialist expansion and fascism. Every step they take intensifies the problems and hastens the day of reckoning. A complicating factor is the survival of feudal forms which accentuate the antagonism between the peasantry and the landowners. It is possible that revolution may have its genesis in the struggles of the peasants when they assimilate the lesson that swashbuckling adventures cannot alleviate their lot. As a practical matter the hope for revolutionary success lies in the ability of the peasants and workers to forge a working alliance for a final overthrow of capitalism. The underground Communist party carries on toward this goal despite the arrests of thousands and their torture in the Mikado's jails. The wave of strikes grows—in the armies, among the peasants, in the cities.

Famine In the Countryside

SOMA HARUTA

VOICES of thin, barefooted, half-starved children shout and beg beside the train as it passes through the desolated fields of the Japanese countryside. They call: "Mister, please throw us your left-over lunch from the window of the train."

This is in the northern part of Japan, where famine has swept over whole sections of the farming population. Millions of peasants and their wives and children have nothing to eat. Some peasants committed suicide when they found no crops in the fields where they had toiled every day from morning to dark.

Many schools have been closed; children, led by their teachers, climb up the hills and crawl among the rocks, grubbing for roots, hunting for seeds and leaves of grass—whatever can be eaten by human beings. Many children have stomach trouble: undigested seed and roots are found in their vomit.

In some villages, chopped straw mixed with water sustains the lives of the peasants. In Iwate prefecture where the famine is most severe, the peasants' total debt reaches as high as 100,000,000 yen, or an average of 1,000 yen per family (or \$280). When three banks in the prefecture went bankrupt during the financial crisis of 1932, many lost their life-savings and some of them committed suicide.

Peasants who have already sunk to the bot-

tom of misery are selling their daughters into prostitution in order to sustain the rest of the family. The young girls are sold for from 50 to 200 yen (\$14 to \$59) and will be held as prostitutes for most of their lives. At Fuchi village (population 900) in Iwate prefecture more than one hundred girls have disappeared from the village since last spring. No young girls are left there. It is called the "village without girls." Peasant girls lost in the red-light district number 200,000, and every year 30,000 or 40,000 more girls are sold as public prostitutes.

The Japanese government had for a while ordered the suppression of news about mass starvation among the peasants on the ground that such news may stimulate unrest. One of the most powerful bourgeois magazines, *The Central Review*, was suppressed on account of an article which described the misery of the peasants. However, after the passage of the largest war budget in Japanese history had finally been passed there was no more reason to keep the wholesale starvation secret. At present, however, the government feverishly appeals to the public through the press and radio to relieve the peasants in the villages from misery and starvation. This zealous campaign seeks "relief" at the expense of the exploited masses. All government employes

have already been forced to donate to the relief fund from their small salaries.

As soon as the censorship was ended the government officials and politicians, pretending to be rescuers, rushed to the famine district. I quote part of a letter written by a peasant who is distrustful of these investigators and such anti-government sentiments are common in the poverty-stricken villages. It says: "The failure of crops, or rather a famine, has again spread in the northern part of Japan, but the tax has never been reduced. The government officials came here to help us, but we know they did nothing for us in those years when we had bad crops for several seasons. We are tired of talk. All those who came here stayed at the best hotel in town and rolled down in expensive cars to the famine villages for the investigation, and the next day they rested at the nearby hot springs, waited upon by the geisha girls. . . ."

As for the peasants, more than two-thirds of them in early June, long before the harvest, had sold out to the last grain of rice which should have been saved for their own food. The workers in the city, of course, have been exploited at starvation wages and can hardly buy rice at any price.

When 1933 brought a good harvest, peasants suffered from the low price of rice. Then

a law for the government regulation of rice was passed in the name of the "protection of peasants," and 400,000,000 yen was spent by the government for the purchase of rice. More than 10,000,000 *koku* of rice were delivered to government warehouses and added to several million *koku* from previous crops.

The big landlords and speculators have been holding enormous quantities of rice, expecting a rise in price under the new policy. Rice is piled like mountains in hundreds of warehouses. After the peasants had sold out their rice crop, they were forced to buy it back at higher prices than they had received for it.

In spite of the failure of rice and other crops, the percentage of the share crops, tax, interest rate, prices of fertilizer and other necessities for the peasant have been rising through the policy of inflation for the war in Manchuria. The peasant side-jobs at home, such as the cultivation of the silk worm and poultry raising, have become less and less profitable. Opportunities for labor during the dead season of the farmers in the construction works of the village, road or bridge building have been growing rarer. The peasant has lost possibility of selling his family's labor-power which covered a great part of the peasant living expense. He now earns so little that he cannot pay his interest, and his debts rise with accelerating rapidity. The total indebtedness of the agrarian population of all Japan has now reached the enormous sum of over 10 billion yen. Moreover, the landlord, the money lender and tax collector knock at his door every day for taxes and other debts.

At one time peasant girls streamed to the cities to become factory workers, to help their distressed families. Their small wages were the only means of saving the peasant household from the actual menace of starvation. Now most of them are forced back to their native villages, although some industries have been booming because of war inflation and dumping due to the lower rate of yen on the foreign exchange. If they still have a job, their wages are less than half as compared with 1929. Especially after the invasion of Manchuria, the speed-up, longer hours of labor and low wages have mercilessly attacked the standards of the peasant girls. The increasing profit since the war, among the ruling class of Japan, has come in part through the increasing exploitation of the miserable peasant girls. They toil from ten to thirteen hours a day and receive from five cents to sixteen cents a day. Unemployed in the city have been driven to the native villages, looking for a shelter with their parents, relatives and friends. There is no relief at all for an army of 4,500,000 unemployed in Japan.

In 1932, 200,000,000 yen was expended for public work to relieve peasants, unemployed and small business men in answer to mass pressure. It was nothing compared to the need. Minister of Finance Takahashi at that time declared this expenditure would continue at least three years, but the following year it was greatly reduced owing to the large war expenditure. This relief work was forced

labor by the government at wages of seven cents to seventeen cents a day.

The peasant in the villages of Japan is thin as a rail. Undernourished, overworked in the field and on the extra work at home, in anguish with his burdens of debt and tax, he is exhausted and has no strength to work. There is much sickness. In Aomori prefecture 4,943 peasant households out of 42,000 were admitted by the government as destitute and needy cases. Half of them are ill and without any medical aid. To this some of the reduced production may be attributed.

In the first nine months of 1934, 4,000 conflicts between the landlord and share-cropper were recorded. In the first nine months of 1932, 2,103 conflicts had been recorded. In fear of the rising wave of the peasant struggle, the ruling class of Japan,

represented by the government, is entering as a mediator of the struggle between the landlord and the peasant, organizing committees for the prevention of conflict in every village.

These usually consist of the chief of police, village head man, one representative of the landlord and one of the peasants in the villages; but at the same time, terror has been intensified against the militant peasants. In the prefectures of Nigata, Saitama, Ibaragi, Shizuoka, Okayama, and Kumamoto, the militant peasant struggle has spread despite all kinds of propaganda for patriotism and terror during the three years of the Manchurian invasion. The peasant, led by the militant farmers' union, is rising against oppression, demanding free rice from the government warehouses and striking against the payment of tax, debts and share crops.

Buick Strikes Back

ADAM SMYTHE

CHAGRINED and smarting under the concessions, insignificant though they were, to labor at Toledo, and apprehensive of sympathy strikes at other plants, the master minds of General Motors are attempting to strike back. They are determined, for one thing, that there shall be no more bottle necks in their production lines; and to that effect are equipping Muncie, as well as Toledo, for the production of transmissions. Arrangements are being made for duplicate plants on similar vital parts in various sections of the country. Other generalissimos of the General Motors' strategy corps are at work on various schemes to keep labor in the place where they think it belongs. It remains, however, for Buick to conceive and execute one of the cleverest ideas yet foisted on the working man and one calculated to frustrate every concession that labor has gained in the last few years.

Studying Buick's new maneuver proves that, though denied by governmental interference the right to intimidate and coerce workers through the police system, the industry under Buick has evolved a corps of storm troopers under the guise of "The Buick Safety League."

The introduction of safeguards into industry to protect lives and limbs is not new, but Buick's interpretation of safety measures through their "protective" use of the loaded billy points to a new trend in living up to the letter of the word. The mechanics of the plan being that Flint officials have inveigled some six hundred volunteers into this league, ostensibly organized to prevent sabotage in case of strikes. With superintendents as majors, assistant superintendents as captains and lieutenants, foremen as sergeants and patrolmen recruited ambiguously from the ranks of labor itself, a battalion emerges to lie in wait for any worker questioning the latest

speed-up, lay-off or "readjustment of piece rate."

Thus, the plan provides against the curiosity of the press with the advent of trouble. Agitations can be shown to have come from within and quelled from within; and the Wagner Disputes Bill can be ostensibly observed because the Safety Leaguers are volunteers, "representing" employees and having their welfare at heart. In recompense for their work, the Safety Leaguers are automatically placed upon the preferred list for work and when they attend the League meetings, sponsored by the management's propaganda committee, they are given full pay for the time lost from their machines. When mobilized for active duty, the billys are to be provided them gratis by the company.

The plan is no longer in a tentative stage. With two majors, one for days and one for nights, commanding the works, it now operates twenty-four hours of the day. Each building has its captain reporting regularly to the plant major. Under the captains are the alert lieutenants and sergeants listening and watching in their divisions, reporting hourly every bit of information received from the patrolmen in the bays themselves. Any exception taken to a worker's conversation or comments during the course of his duty is recorded on a card in the main office and the man is watched for further digressions.

Should a strike, despite such military surveillance, break out among the workers, the Safety League goes into action and within fifteen minutes army discipline is in control of the plant. Patrolmen, armed with billys, move up and down the bays. Sergeants and lieutenants report constantly to their captains, while the major, in the main office, holds his conferences and discusses strategy. Any ensuing intimidation can be reported officially as a plant brawl.