

THE BATTLE OF THE LABOR-BAITERS

Bruce Minton reports on the dangerous tactics of the appeasement congressmen who are obstructing the fight against Hitler by clamoring for anti-union measures.

Washington (November 13)

THIS has been a week of drama, but just as much, it has been a week of the utmost confusion. On Armistice Day, last Tuesday, it was generally conceded that the Neutrality Act revisions, approved by the Senate, would coast through the House without great difficulty. But as though to negate this promise of a stronger national front against Hitlerism, the National Defense Mediation Board announced on the eve of the House neutrality debate its decision to deny the union shop to the United Mine Workers in the captive mines. Certainly, the decision encouraged the anti-laborites in Congress.

On the following day, Wednesday, the House began its debate, limited to eight hours in all. Abruptly the bolt was on. The southern Democrats, up to then supporters of the administration's foreign policy, joined the indecisive "liberals" (who at the last moment got cold feet in the face of America First) and the isolationists in an effort to block repeal of those sections of the Neutrality Act which forbade American merchant ships' entering combat zones and belligerent ports. All at once, hope faded for a comfortable margin of victory as bumbling bourbons, office holders by courtesy of the poll tax, ranted against labor and thundered once again the stale libels against the "Reds." They studiously kept away from the real issues; lamentably, the administration supporters proved equally uninspired. So poorly were things going for a time that it looked as though the amendments might lose. The administration, caught off base, rallied as best it could. The President and Secretary Hull sent strong letters to the House. In the end, the amendments just squeaked through.

What happened? How serious are the implications of the House revolt, and how do matters stand now? Any discussion must necessarily begin with an apology: it is too soon yet to give clearcut, positive answers. A few weeks from now, these climactic days can be viewed in some perspective. But at present I can do no more than list a few facts, tell how things look down here in this maelstrom of excitement, and hazard one or two general impressions.

THE LABOR SITUATION cannot be dismissed as a problem in itself. For the defections in the House are intimately connected with the controversy over the captive mines. They are so interrelated that it is impossible to view one without the other, impossible to under-

stand what certain congressmen are up to unless it is also understood what has been done to labor.

When the Neutrality Act was up before the Senate last week, Senator Tydings of Maryland made a speech elaborating and redecorating the previous rantings of his mentor, Senator Byrd of Virginia. Now Tydings' only claim to importance, for all his loud-mouthed forensics, is that he was slated for the "purge" in 1938. What gave his talk some significance was that up to then he had gone along with the administration's foreign policy.

Tydings repeated his speech over the radio Sunday afternoon, four days before the House vote on Neutrality repeal, for home consumption. Thereupon, certain observers sat up and took notice. For Tydings was engaged in a neat political trick. Sometimes it is called "proposing a trade" and sometimes, in less polite language, it is called "blackmail." Stripping the senator's remarks of their cloying rhetoric, there remained a hard core of threat. The senator pointed out that he would withhold support from the administration until the President changed his attitude toward labor. So long as the unions were "coddled" (and Mr. Tydings, like Mr. Byrd and the rest of their tribe, lacked the courage and honesty to explain that when he said "coddled" he really meant "allowed to exist"), so long

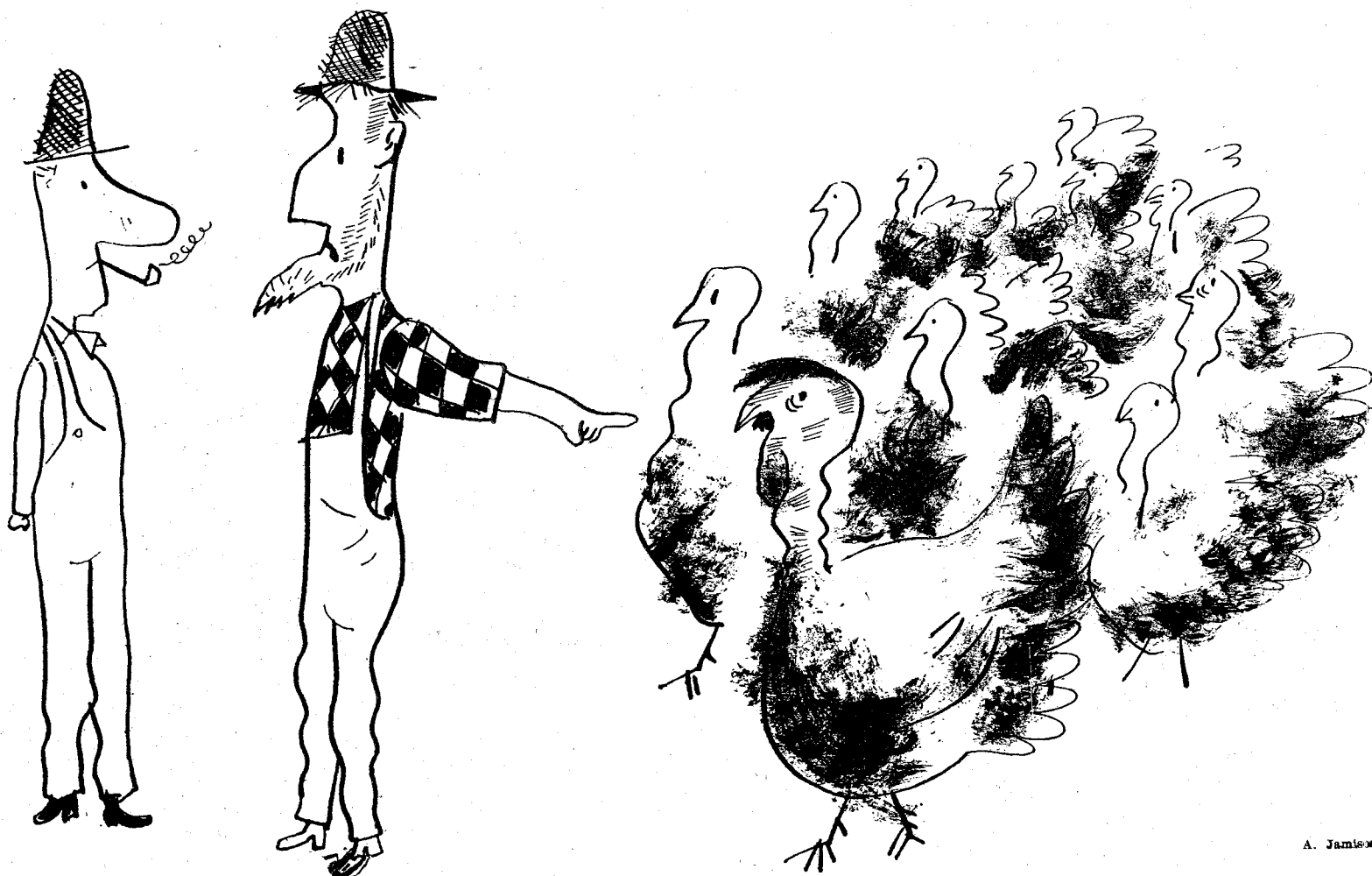
as the labor movement was not dealt with sternly, he could not see his way clear to favoring any further action by this country against the Hitler menace. Of course, Mr. Tydings upbraided Hitler in passing, but he gave far more emphasis to the pretty warning that if this nation did not smash the unions "then the biggest lynching party that ever descended on a capital should string our carcasses as ornaments on the telegraph poles of Washington."

In other words, here was an expressed eagerness to hamstring foreign policy unless and until labor in this country was done in once and for all. On Wednesday, in the House, Mr. Tydings' lyric was sung over and over again by southern reactionaries like Howard Smith, member of the Byrd machine in Virginia, Richards of South Carolina, and Sasser of Maryland. With each rendition, the theme took on new embellishments; the blackmail price was raised to include not only the crushing of labor, but also the canceling of all social legislation, the end of "non-defense expenditures" (WPA, social security, NYA, farm benefits, and so on down the line). The bourbons, holding a semblance of a balance of power on the issue of foreign policy, and responding to the applause of Ham Fish and the northern appeasers, adorned in fine words the sentiments expressed in the November Economic Bulletin of the National City Bank: "Arbitrary restrictions on working hours, strikes, and repeated demands for higher wages are adding greatly to the cost of the defense program, and are as much a matter for public concern as failure to control costs in other directions." In addition, the congressional highwaymen paraphrased the bulletin which urged a program of tax the poor, make the people pay for the whole cost of the war, because "... taxes which take too large a share of profits tend to discourage economy and weaken employer resistance to whatever demands are made."

The origin of this particular blackmail plot has been traced to groups among big employers who fear for their great prerogatives. They are alarmed by the prospect of a just war against German fascism. So they hold out for assurances that the labor movement will be crippled first.

To their standard flocked the southern diehards, the appeasers, and nine Tammany henchmen. Their cause was strengthened by shortsighted and vacillating progressives, like Representative Coffee of Washington, who





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"There's something wrong with that one. It says goebbel, goebbel, goebbel."

were alarmed at the danger of an administration defeat and who sought safety by getting on the bandwagon. The whole motley crew abandoned their constituents, whose wishes counted for nothing. They had no interest in the overwhelming mass support of the President's program of smashing Hitler. And to whet the appetites of these headstrong men, the Mediation Board decided against the union shop. Like all appeasements, this sop not only failed to satisfy, but in truth encouraged demands for more. It would be oversimple to say that the Mediation Board's ruling was merely a response to congressional shouts against labor. But it would be just as incorrect to say that the clamor played no part.

The board, condemning itself by its own reasoning, gave plenty of evidence of its response to the labor-baiters in Congress. Yes, declared the nine majority members, "substantially ninety percent of the total annual production of bituminous coal is under union shop contracts and . . . in the open shop captive mines involved in this dispute, approximately ninety-five percent of the mine workers have voluntarily become members of the United Mine Workers." But just for that reason, and because the UMW is powerful, because postponement of the UMW demand for the union shop would not "seriously impair the security of the United Mine Workers," the board did not feel that "the signing of

the union shop agreement by the operators involved in this dispute is necessary. . . ." Actually, the board as much as admitted that if the UMW had been weak, then it would have been granted the union shop.

Of course, no one—on the board, in Congress, in the labor movement, among the employers—doubted that this decision was directed against the entire labor movement. The Mediation Board and the reactionaries in Congress have delayed the winning of unity—and have actually acted to discourage labor support—by confronting the unions with a dilemma not of their making. The result is to disrupt the war effort and to obstruct the nation's security.

The harm done by the Mediation Board's capitulation to the owners of the captive mines, headed by Morgan's US Steel, goes still deeper. Friction between the CIO and AFL is aggravated by the understandable resent-

ment of CIO members against the AFL bureaucrats on the board who deserted labor's cause to echo the employers. More than that, John L. Lewis, with his avid hostility to the President and to the administration's fight against Hitlerism, has gained a new talking point. Up to this week, Lewis was losing ground.

In this emergency there remains the administration's power to act in the interests of labor. Its whole foreign policy is running the risk of being impeded by the anti-union appeasement elements. There is real criticism to be made of the fact that the administration has not done enough to convince the people of their real stake in the war. True, the President and other high administration officials have talked to them over the radio. But other than that there has been no coordinated program of education. All the various information agencies, with the possible exception of the Treasury Department's radio program, have shown little ability to explain the reasons why Hitler and Hitlerism cannot be tolerated. The results are reflected in mail received by on-the-fence congressmen from America First groups, from the thousands misled by the Lindberghs and Wheelers. But the great millions who hate Hitlerism have failed in any numbers to write their congressman. Their voices have much to teach Congress.

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HOW TO READ THE NEWS FROM BRITAIN

Things are not always what they seem. Claude Cockburn helps Americans gauge political events in London. A review of some speeches and debates in Parliament.

London (by cable).

WHAT with everyone saying there were quite certainly going to be some Cabinet changes and then Churchill saying there are going to be nothing of the sort; what with the announcement that we now have air parity with the Nazis but still apparently cannot open a second front anywhere, though nine-tenths of their force (whose totality is equal to ours) are in Russia; what with the extraordinarily slapdash official attempt to put the skids under the Labor MP Emanuel Shinwell, who is a major exponent of a strengthened "win-the-war" government, and the notable flop of that attempt when the press was through with it; what with all this, the outside observer is pretty apt to lose perspective on what is happening in Britain.

It will be useful, in fact it will be essential, if we are to get a balanced view of what the situation here is in general and the situation around the Cabinet is in particular, just to list a few of the most significant real facts about Britain in the past two weeks or so.

IF YOU were over here, and we could sit down for half an hour ticking off these facts on our fingers without bothering too much just what order of importance they come in, we should get something like this: first, the amazing Beaverbrook meeting at Manchester when the lord and Minister of Supply met the shop stewards. I mentioned that meeting a fortnight ago as one of the big events that was due to come off here. It did. And how.

Most significant point of all, of course, was that this is the first—and it will not be the last—time that a British Minister has publicly recognized the existence of the organized shop stewards as the most vital force in British war industry at this moment and gone out in the country to talk to them publicly. The recognition itself marks a big and important jump forward. I mentioned some time ago as one of the weaknesses in the situation the fact that Churchill really does not have very much understanding of the modern British working man—the skilled engineer, for instance. If he did he would refrain from foolish jibing at the Communists who—together with so many other forces—have supplied the backbone and muscles of the shop stewards' movement and of the whole drive for increased production.

And here is another point about the meeting at which Beaverbrook appeared. A comedy of discretions, if you like. Beaverbrook went there expecting that there would be an enormous outburst of demand for the second front. And it is no secret that Beaverbrook would have liked to have faced such a demand and come back to the Cabinet room with the news of it. Characteristically, at the other end of the business, the shop stewards' delegates

were absolutely determined that nothing and nobody should be allowed to disrupt the meeting, or to give any excuse for the government to say that you cannot meet the stewards because they make an uproar about things you did not go to talk about. And Beaverbrook was only scheduled to discuss production.

We had just had the unfortunate experience of the big Trafalgar Square rally where Ellen Wilkinson was howled down by Trotskyists, and provocateurs masquerading as Communists. So the shop stewards decided that while they could raise the question of the *Daily Worker* ban—because the lifting of the ban is a matter of direct and vital importance in connection with the production drive—they could not raise the question of the "second front" because it might be said not to be "directly" connected with production. There was the noble lord hoping and praying for a tornado of "second front" demands whose strength he could report on to the Cabinet, and there were the serried ranks of the shop stewards, all of them desiring to raise the question of the "second front" but being so "discreet" that they never did.

I tell you that story in full because it is somehow humanly characteristic of our situation. But the big fact is that there was that meeting and that the newsreels of it are being shown all over Britain this week.

The second incident of the week: Churchill's announcement that we now have air parity with the Luftwaffe. Was there the expected outburst of enthusiasm over that? To be exact, not quite. Why not? Simply and solely because everyone felt in the back of their minds that while this is a grand thing, it would be a much easier thing to rejoice about if this long-sought parity were to be resulting in some major attack somewhere by our forces. And that is a significant and characteristic thing too. The British people are not satisfied even with such hugely encouraging statements as Churchill's about air parity. They are glad. But they look at the Eastern Front and say: "Good, and what do we do with it? When do we start?"

Third incident: Churchill's assurance on Japan.

Fourth incident: News of big British maneuvers in Malaya looking to a possible jungle war for the defense of the Burma Road.

Fifth incident: A sustained campaign in the *London Times*, backed by the *Sunday Observer*, to demand why the devil the government is taking so long about declaring war on Hitler's satellite states. The *Times* strongly suggests that the reason is that the British government is paying a great deal too much attention to allegedly reactionary American opinion on this subject.

Sixth incident: The fact that almost the

entire press weighted its stories on the Shinwell-Alexander duel in the House in favor of Shinwell. (A. V. Alexander, first Lord of the Admiralty, took Shinwell to task for his outspoken criticism of the government in the matter of a second front.)

Now just why are these facts significant? How do they total? They total up to this: that slowly things in this country are moving in the proper direction. They mean more—once you accept the limitations of a political situation littered with the debris of a bad past—than the fact that once again Churchill has been unable to announce the Cabinet changes that people are asking for. They mean more than the fact that even now the people and the forces of audacity and of initiative are not able to compel the opening of the second front. But it would be a grave though very understandable mistake if you in America were to get bogged down so to speak in the details of our Cabinet and near Cabinet intrigues to such an extent as not to be able to see the fact that the thing really is moving. The intrigues around the Cabinet are important. But the disruptive elements—whether they work through the extreme right, the near fascists, the crypto-appeasers, the Trotskyites, or the sectarian bureaucrats still powerfully at large in the Labor Party—are working not with the stream but against it.

All this is very bad news for the Nazis. It is bad news for any Nazi agent or sympathizer in any country, and particularly in the United States, who hopefully considers that perhaps, because we have not yet got the second front and because we have not yet got the strengthened Cabinet that is needed, we are not getting anywhere in the direction of these objectives. I say with all possible deliberation that that is not true. The very sharpest criticisms of the failure to create the second front and the failure to strengthen the Cabinet are justified. It is monstrous that the old gang should still cling to the jobs it does. It is a monstrous demonstration of the continued power and influence of the old gang. And yet with all that it is still true that the old gang are on the skids. And they know it. They may be able to do a lot of mischief yet. I expect they will. But you cannot look at the real facts of life in England today—not facts gathered from "the left" exclusively but facts from all sectors of the slowly developing national front—without seeing that it is not the patriots and the anti-fascists who are on the defensive. On the contrary. They are pressing the enemy hard. It is the appeasers and the do-nothings who are on the defensive. They are still holding their ground. But the forces of victory are becoming stronger and more unified day by day.

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