

## COMPULSORY LABOUR SERVICE

In the House of Commons, November 3rd, Mr. Rhys Davies (Labour—Westhoughton) moved, and Mr. David Grenfell (Labour—Gower) seconded, a motion to annul the Control of Engagement Order, S.R. & O., 1947, No. 2021. The motion was defeated by 252 to 144, the majority consisting wholly of Labour Members. In the minority were Conservatives and Liberals, also Mr. A. Edwards, Captain Blackburn and Mr. S. O. Davies from the Labour benches, and the following Independents: Messrs. W. D. Kendall, D. L. Lipson and W. J. Brown. Messrs. Rhys Davies and David Grenfell were the tellers against the Government. We give this extract:—

Mr. RHYS DAVIES: I want to proclaim the gospel here that every man ought to be entitled to choose his own job instead of having a job chosen for him by a stranger. The difference between a slave and a free man is that the free man has the right to strike and the right to choose his own job instead of being told by a clerk at an employment exchange what job he must accept. The Government, the Coal Board and, if I may say so, some trade union officials forget the truth that man does not live by bread alone. The spirit of man must be taken into account in all this; and the soul of the decent workman is offended when he is ordered about as if he were one of a flock of sheep.

If these regulations are allowed to pass, the next stage will be an attempt to convince the people that tyranny is good for them. They will be taught to like the chains that bind them. I have no illusions about what can happen in this connection. See how this tyranny grows, little by little. The first indication we had of the intention of the Government to direct labour was in a speech delivered by the Minister at Carlisle at the end of August. He then said that a mild form of direction might become necessary, but that nobody would be sent away to work from his home town. Later on, when he met the Joint Consultative Council for Industry, he promised that these powers would be used sparingly. The Minister also said that he would not use this direction for the men at the bottom and let the men at the top go free. But in his long list of exemptions from direction, all the men at the top are free and all the men at the bottom are to be directed.

Let us see how this thing works in the mining industry already. This is what I saw reported in the Press the other day:—

A number of colliery workers will leave South Wales to-day to try to identify miners who are believed to have left the pits to work in the hopfields of Herefordshire. The names of any miners found will be passed on to the Ministry of Labour who may take proceedings against them under the Control of Engagement Order. Officials of the Coal Board and the Ministry of Labour, it is stated, have already interviewed some miners in the hopfields.

I have not spent 50 years in this movement to see my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench ordering sleuths to look for miners in the hopfields. The day of reckoning arising from this interference with freedom will come—to them.

The Conservatives opposite allege that this Government are creating class hatred. I do not know whether it is true or not, but I know this much: that if this regulation comes into operation the Government will create divisions and hatred within sections of the working class themselves. It will result in neighbour spying upon neighbour; workers telling tales against their comrades; and informers and denouncers will grow like mushrooms. Mr. Speaker, I am 70 years of age, I have seen tyranny at its worst, and freedom at its best. Having seen what tyranny has done to other nations, I care not, where freedom is concerned, who opposes me or who supports me. Some people argue that we ought to have a Coalition Government to get over this crisis. What I think we need is a Labour Government to return to the simple principles that we used to preach on the Socialist platforms. That is what we need to clean up the whole of all this foul thing called directing people to certain jobs.

In the White Paper, "The Economic Survey, 1947," it is said—and nothing I say to-day can equal the eloquence of that annotation on the problem of the direction of labour:—

There is an essential difference between totalitarian and

democratic planning. The former subordinates all individual desires and preferences to the demands of the State. For this purpose, it uses various methods of compulsion upon the individual which deprive him of the freedom of choice. Such methods may be necessary even in a democratic country during the extreme emergency of a great war. Thus the British people gave their war-time Government the power to direct labour. But in normal times, the people of a democratic country will not give up their freedom of choice to their Government. A democratic Government must therefore conduct its economic planning in a manner which preserves the maximum possible freedom of choice to the individual citizen.

That is what I am trying to say now in another form. I shall be told that I am embarrassing the Government over this Motion. I am a Member of Parliament. I have been elected eight times. I have championed this freedom all my life, and I shall continue to preach it. Freedom will remain when those who talk differently have gone down to the dust. The soul of the British people is behind what I am saying to-day. Let those who tell me that this might bring the Government down, I remember this my last word on this—better that the Government should meet their doom than that individual freedom should perish in the British Isles.

## A LIBERAL BRANDS THE GOVERNMENT

Speaking at Buckley (Flints.) on October 3rd, Mr. Clement Davies, M.P., said, *Manchester Guardian* report:—

"The Government has declared war on freedom. Instead of being progressive it is the most retrograde Government we have had since the days of Lord North, and even longer, for the only parallel to the Control of Engagement Order occurred 600 years ago.

"It was the Statute of Labourers of 1349, passed after the Black Death, when agricultural workers were put back into the position of serfs. Under the Act men were compelled to remain at their jobs, whether they liked it or not, and at the rate of wages then prevailing. That is an Act every history book has denounced as the most retrograde in the long and varied history of Britain.

"It remains for this Government—copying the examples of Germany, Italy, and Russia—to threaten the freedom of the people. They have imposed more and more restrictions than were even contemplated in time of war. That is not the way to recovery. There was a time when a Minister was warned, and rightly, 'The people will not stand for it.' There is a danger to-day that they will stand for anything. A nation enchained will not give of its best. Slave labour is the worst kind of labour. We must have freedom and the spirit of enterprise, so that men will give of their best."

We offer to the playwright, Mr. Priestley, the following item taken from the *Daily Telegraph* of October 20th. It is a theme for another "Laburnum Grove," in which the forger did such a "public service" by making money available. It may also content those "economists" who include "anything of value" in their definitions of wealth, from which even genuine coupons—and they, too, have a considerable market—are definitely ruled out by more intelligent folk:—

"Scotland Yard provincial C.I.D.s. and Board of Trade investigators are combining in a nation-wide investigation to discover the sources of huge quantities of forged clothing coupons which are being distributed. They are almost perfect copies....

"Although dozens of distributing agents have been convicted, no clue to the identity of the forgers has been discovered. There is undoubtedly a highly efficient organisation for the distribution of the coupons. Some are being sold in bulk to black market dealers and small shopkeepers, and others are going to individuals at 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. each. Distributors caught by the police have had as many as 5,000 on them."

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