

# AGAINST COLONIAL OPPRESSION

## More Oppression for the African Masses.

### The Riotous Assemblies Act.

By Vers chraegen.

One more law adorns the statute book of South Africa already overcrowded with slave legislation.

Not contented with the already existing oppressive legislation against the Africans, Pass Laws, Master and Servant Laws, land robbery, Colour Bar Acts, cruel taxation, urban areas etc. etc., the South African bourgeoisie led by Hertzog, Pirow & Co., representing the backward agrarian elements, inspired by Smuts and the South African Party, and assisted by Creswell and the Labour Party got the Riotous Assemblies (Amendment) Act passed which in effect means that not only must the Africans remain slaves as hitherto and be further enslaved, but should they or anyone else dare even to protest in a **constitutional** manner against any oppression, a criminal offence is committed punishable by imprisonment, banishment from certain centres or deportation. Before analysing the contents of the new monstrosity in detail, a few words may not be out of place in connection with the origin of and circumstances which led up to the Principal Act passed in 1914.

During the years 1913—14 South Africa was convulsed by a wave of strikes in all the important industries of the country, mining, engineering, railway etc. culminating in the shooting of a score or more of defenceless workers on the Market Square, Johannesburg, and the illegal deportation of a number of strike leaders.

As its provisions clearly show the act was designed principally to afford the utmost protection to blacklegs and strike-breakers, and to make unlawful actions which are inevitably connected with the conduct of strike.

The following became criminal offences punishable by long terms of imprisonment and deportation:

- a) the least interference with scabs (e. g. calling a scab "scab");
- b) compelling a non-union worker to join his union even by ordinary trade union methods;
- c) blacklisting scabs;
- d) picketing even if peaceful.

In addition the Minister of Justice is given special powers to prohibit meetings, and a section is included, providing for special tribunals without juries—a kind of courts martial to try offences under this Act.

In the subsequent years different provisions of the Act have been rigidly applied against workers and workers' organisations and many were severely punished for contraventions thereof. In 1927 the infamous Native Administration Act was passed in spite of widespread opposition and a clause inserted making it a criminal offence to promote feelings of hostility between Europeans and Natives. It seems really farcical that the Hertzogs, the Smuts, the Creswells and the other oppressors who are the chief promoters of hostility between Africans and Europeans by oppressing the former, by the issue of public manifestoes calling on the whites to rally against the

black menace should pass such laws, but of course it was directed against the Communist Party and no one else.

Some time later Comrade Bunting, the chairman of the Party, was convicted under this Act for "promoting hostility", but on appeal the Supreme Court held that the section did not apply to the Communist doctrines as such and the conviction was set aside. Immediately Smuts, that darling of British Imperialism and Mac-Donald's Labour Party, raised the matter in the Union Parliament pointing out the seriousness of the situation resulting from the Supreme Court judgement, and urging that legislation be passed instantly curbing the activities of the Communist agitators. Pirow, the Minister of Justice, the representative of coffee-drinking, pipe-smoking, parasitical feudal landlordism, joyfully accepted the opposition leaders' warning and promised to introduce early legislation with a view to curbing the activities of the agitators amongst natives, and the outcome was the present amendment of the Act which is law now. The new Act is not only a fiendish outrage on the very meagre rights of the Africans, but has even "outraged" liberal bourgeois opinion in and outside South Africa, assigning as it does all powers of obtaining evidence, trying, convicting and punishing of offenders exclusively to the Minister.

He is vested under the new Act with wider powers regarding the prohibition of meetings, prohibiting certain persons from attending meetings. He may in addition prohibit any book, foreign magazine, pamphlet, manifesto, foreign newspaper, handbill or poster, article, advertisement or cartoon, picture or drawing.

He may further exclude any person from any area, and deport any foreign-born person who is convicted of any contravention of this Act.

He and he alone decides who is guilty, and he passes sentence, he is responsible to no one except himself, and even the courts have no say in matters.

It was this that so much upset the liver of the Liberals. Suppress working class papers? Banish and deport working class leaders? Prohibit meetings? By all means, but take the authority away from the courts of law, transgress the sacred constitutional principle of the supremacy of the law, terrible! Outrageous! The bourgeois elements, however, were really upset about the transgression of a constitutional tradition. The most important question to them is the subjection and exploitation of the Africans and, although they desire to do it in a more "decent" manner, in the good old British imperialist nice way of merciless exploitation in a gentle way, making the slaves believe that they are absolutely free citizens of the British Empire and subjects of His Majesty, they readily fell in with Pirow's uncouth and rather crude method.

It is interesting, although not surprising to note that Creswell, the leader of that stinking corpse commonly known as the Creswellish Section of the S.A. Labour Party, Minister of Defence and Labour, and Sampson an old trade union leader and until lately President of the South African Typographical Union, and their followers, except two, have supported Pirow's Act and voted in its favour. A motion at the annual conference of the same body protesting feebly against the measure was not even discussed. The Trades Union Congress and many of its affiliated unions have sent strong protests, and a special meeting of joint executives also adopted a strong resolution against the new law, but Pirow's reply was very curt and blunt. He was not prepared to give any consideration to Trade Union representation except on purely trade union matters.

In Parliament the only opposition came from two members of the National Council Section of the Labour Party. Some South African Party members opposed the methods, but wholeheartedly supported the principle—a united front of the white imperialists to crush the African masses.

The Communist Party organised mass demonstrations against the Bill in various centres. In Cape Town a march on Parliament resulted in several windows being broken and a number of arrests, but the call of the Party to all workers to down tools as a protest against the eniquitous measure received no response. The African masses, however, are gradually awakening from their slumber. Their yoke is becoming unbearable, and when they rise, British Imperialism and white domination will have to answer a long list of foul crimes against Africa.