

THE REAL SCANDAL OF THE "DOLE"

BY
BRENNAN WARD

WORKER'S POINT 1

Increased
unemployment
benefit and
abolition of all
disqualifying
restrictions and
task work.
Benefit for each
unemployed
day.



CHARTER POINT 2

Against
increased
insurance
contributions
For non-
contributory
unemployment.
National
Health,
social insurance.
For increased
Social Services.



ONE HALF-PENNY

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REAL SCANDAL OF THE "DOLE"

THE Royal Commission on Unemployment, set up by the Labour Government last year, in its majority report has just recommended the most savage and sweeping attack on the workers' standard of living in history. The Commission proposes the following reduction in benefit:—

Men over 21	..	..	..	17s. to 15s.
Young men 18-21	..	..	..	14s. to 12s.
Women over 21	..	..	..	15s. to 13s.
Boys 17-18	..	..	..	9s. to 7s.
Boys 16-17	..	..	..	6s. to 5s.
Girls 17-18	..	..	..	7s. 6d. to 6s.
Girls 16-17	..	..	..	remains 5s.
Female dependant	..	..	..	9s. to 8s.
Child dependant	..	..	..	remains 2s.

The Commission suggests that guaranteed standard benefit should be paid only for six months, within the period of twelve months following the date of application. At present, providing he satisfies the other conditions, a worker can claim standard benefit for 78 weeks. Transitional benefit is also to be attacked. Under the present Act, a worker can claim transitional benefit if he has paid eight stamps during the two years preceding the application or 30 stamps at any time. It is recommended that this should be made eight stamps in the two years preceding unemployment or 30 stamps in the past six years. This will especially hit the industrial areas effected by the post-war slump of 1920-21 and where mass unemployment has become practically a permanent feature.

Single workers and widowers without children are to be singled out for an even more ruthless assault. A "needs test" is suggested for these workers, benefit not to be paid if the applicant's family is adjudged to be in a position to keep him or her. For married women a stringent examination of their claims is recommended, and for part-time workers an earnings test.

Besides these cuts, the Commission recommends that contribution to the Unemployment Insurance Fund should be increased as follows: workers 2d., from 7d. to 9d.; employers 1d., from 8d. to 9d.; State 1½d., from 7½d. to 9d. Young workers' contributions are to be increased proportionately.

These are the recommendations of the Royal Commission, and though possibly the resistance of the workers will be such that the Labour Government will not dare operate them all, it is evident that the report is to be the basis of a vicious attack. Labour Ministers made this clear in Parliament; all the evidence given at

the Commission went to show that this was its purpose. Snowden, in the House of Commons, on February 11th, both gave the Commission its instructions and declared the Labour Government's intention to enforce the recommendations: "The national position," he said "is so grave that drastic and disagreeable measures will have to be taken." J. J. Lawson, Margaret Bondfield's aide-de-camp, was just as blunt. The debt on the Unemployment Fund, he stated was increasing by £40,000,000 a year. "Nobody, of course," he said, "assumes that the Unemployment Insurance Scheme is to-day in a satisfactory position. The piling up of debt cannot go on; the scheme must be put on a self-supporting basis. That is agreed."

Workers have not such short memories that they forget it was these same people who stumped the country during the General Election with the pledge of the Labour Party contained in "*Labour and the Nation*": "The Labour Party will take every step in its power to ensure that the provision for unemployment is humane and adequate, and will meet the additional cost by State grants, so that it falls neither on the worker's contribution nor on the cost of production. It will introduce such amendments as are necessary in the Unemployment Insurance Acts, in order that the needs of the insured unemployed worker shall be fairly met, and will extend the principle of unemployment insurance to sections of the population, such as agricultural workers and domestic servants, at present outside its scope." That was the promise: workers will judge how it squares with the performance.

As for the mock campaign of the Trades Union Congress against the Commission, this is brazen effrontery. The T.U.C. is one of the chief bulwarks of the Labour Government. Many of its members are also members of the Government, and all support it. And it was the Labour Government that set up the Commission. This sham campaign is nothing more than an effort to deceive the workers into believing that the wage-cutting officials of the T.U.C. will lead them in a fight against the Royal Commission; nothing more than an impudent attempt to save the face of the Labour Government.

Do not believe the Labour Government when it says it will not apply the "majority Report" of their Royal Commission. They are already beginning to apply their recommendations by proposing to at once rob the unemployed workers of £5,500,000 per year.

Do not forget that the Labour Government's instructions to the Royal Commission showed its purpose; the evidence, with its vile canards against the unemployed, made it even more clear. Young miners in South Wales actually marrying on the "dole," bring up families, and "on top of that purchasing wireless sets." Lancashire mill lasses refusing domestic service and going for trips to Blackpool on their workless pay. Married men with four children receiving the amazing sum of 34s. a week and yet permitted to earn another £1 a week. Married women getting benefit although their husbands were earning good wages. . . . All the other lies to hide capitalism's

deliberate starving of the nearly 8,000,000 men, women and children dependant on their miserable "dole."

It is this denying of food and the other necessities of life to capitalism's great army of unwanted that is the real scandal of the "dole"—a scandal which damns the system perpetrating it in the eyes of every worker. And proof of this scandal could not only be given by every worker, is not merely recorded in the working-class Press, but even finds its way every day into the capitalist newspapers. Scarcely a day passes but one sees in one journal or another such a paragraph as this "Arthur Hill, aged 38, was a maintenance engineer at the Hotel Cecil until the hotel was closed. Since then he has been out of work. He left his lodgings in Fern-dale Road, Brixton, on Friday evening, and his body was found in the Thames, off Grosvenor Road, Westminster, on Monday. Two pawn tickets were in the pockets. At the inquest at Westminster yesterday a verdict of found drowned was recorded."

Even grimmer than those of unemployed workers who give up the struggle to live are the cases of workers who try to carry on week after week on the miserable pittances given then by "employment" exchange or Public Assistance Committee. Here is a report from a Liverpool paper :

"Last week I had no wages, and I signed on five days for the dole, and when I went for the dole there was none. I was given a food ticket, but how can I pay rent with a food ticket?"

This was the answer of William Walker at the Liverpool County Court yesterday when summoned for £16 2s. 6d. arrears of rent. He had lived in the house for 16 years.

"It is a hard case," said the judge, "and you may have difficulty in paying the rent, but it is hard on the landlord. Why don't you go out of the house?"

Walker: I can't get another one, your honour; I have too many children.

The Judge: You must pay a shilling a week off the arrears in addition to the current rent of 7s. 2d., and if you fail, the bailiffs will go in.

And here is a Deptford correspondent writing in the *Daily Worker* on May, 22 :

Robert E. Green, aged 17, had only 26 stamps on his unemployment card and was unable to get benefit. He applied to the Public Assistance Committee for relief, but the case was referred to the Relieving Officer for Deptford, who gave Green an order for the workhouse.

Green is one of eight children. His father, when employed, earns £2. 10s. a week, out of which has to be paid 22s. 6d. rent for two rooms and 1s. 8d. insurance. The rest, of course, has to keep the family going.

The secretary of the Oldham branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement relates how he was approached by a 46-year-old worker who had been disallowed benefit. He was living with his brother, aged 67, and the only income they had was 10s. old-age pension and 4s. from the Public Assistance Committee. "We are practically starving," he said. "Out of 14s. a week we have to pay 6s. for rent, 2s. 6d. for coal, 1s. for lighting, 6d. for insurance and 6d. for soap. This leaves us the 'magnificent' sum of 3s. 6d.

a week to buy food, clothing and 'enjoy' ourselves." Prior to 1927 this worker had worked full-time for twelve years, yet the Court of Referees disallowed his case, and the Public Assistance Committee refused to help while he awaited the result of his appeal to the umpire.

In Leeds so great is the number of starving and desperate unemployed that the crypt of St. George's Church has been thrown open for their use. (Mr., now *Sir* Ben Turner performed the opening ceremony!) Straw mattresses are provided as "sleeping accommodation" and there are "refreshments" in the form of a cup of cocoa and a slice of bread. To entice the unemployed to religion there is even a small separate chapel for "private worship." This is all capitalism can offer its redundants in this twentieth century of almost unbelievable scientific and productive attainments: it would be laughable were it not so tragically serious for the working-class.

And even without the Royal Commission's recommendations, the Labour Government has tightened up the regulations at the labour exchange during the past twelve months. More Courts of Referees are being held, and an average of 11,000 workers are being disallowed benefit every week on one or other of the disqualifying restrictions. In addition workers in receipt of benefit are being drafted into blackleg Training Centres, while workers getting relief are forced to do task work. A vivid description of conditions in these Training Centres is given in the *Daily Worker*, on April 18th, by a worker living in the centre at Brandon, in Norfolk:

The housing accommodation consists of six huts. We sleep on a palliasse on three bed boards about six inches from the deck. The huts are about 84 ft. by 19 ft., and 34 workers sleep in them. The hours of work are eight. Each man goes through a supposed graduated process of hardening, from easily passing the time away in the carpenters' or blacksmiths' shops to strenuous graft in the chalk and gravel pits.

The men are split up into various gangs for the week; each has a ganger, who are mostly ex-soldiers. Their work consists in getting the boys to work and reporting anyone who refuses to fall into line. There is a system of black marks against men, which is admitted adversely to affect their chances of getting any jobs that come in. The ganger or foreman is in a worse position than the trainee. Their wages are very small. They got about £2 per week. They are between two fires, in the sense that they are expected to hold their men and get them to work.

There is 13s. kept out of our dole every week for food, and we receive the remaining 4s. The food, we consider, is very poor and very badly cooked. And, of course, we have been told that we are expected to put weight on here. We believe we could live better if we had the 13s. to provide for ourselves. But we are in the position of having to accept everything here, of course; if we don't like it we needn't stay. But if we leave here, we are threatened with having our dole stopped.

Nearly all the men here are under compulsion. We are promised jobs after eight weeks at the latest. But there are many here who have been over eight weeks. We think it all a farce, because only one has gone out this last three weeks.

Conditions in the "colonies" set up by the Public Assistance Committees are even more notorious. Workers are sent there after having been cut off from all relief. They are paid no money,

but if they behave they are given a ticket for 2s. 6d. which they have to spend in the canteen. A worker who returned from the Belmont colony in Surrey, has told how he and others were compelled to go out and pick vegetables to stave off their hunger. "Slave labour" in very truth!

As for the dire effects of prolonged unemployment upon the health of workers and their families, the last Annual Report presented on May 26th, to the conference of the Hearts of Oak Friendly Society—which is by no means a working-class organisation—is itself a smashing answer to the lying attacks of the Press hacks and Labour lackeys of capitalism. Here is what the Hearts of Oak Friendly Society says: "Grave concern has been caused by the continuous and serious increase in sickness claims during the last few years. This increase, which has kept pace with, and even outrun, the incidence of unemployment, may be due partly to the distress existing in some sections of the community and its undermining effect on health."

This is the real scandal of the "dole." The scandal of nearly two million workers whose wives and kiddies never have enough to eat, never have enough boots and clothes, never have the things that members of a civilized community are entitled to claim. Not attacks on the unemployed, but a scale of benefit that will be free from all restrictions, and that will guarantee them a decent standard of living—this is the demand of every British worker. And there is not a thinking worker but will support the demands of Points One and Two of the Workers' Charter:

1. For increased unemployment benefit and abolition of all disqualifying restrictions and task work. Benefit for each unemployed day. Repudiation of the Royal Commission on Unemployment.

2. Against increased insurance contributions. For non-contributory unemployment and National Health social Insurance. For increased social services.

And what is meant exactly by this claim for higher benefit, by the other demands? Already thousands of unemployed workers have signed the petition form issued by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement which lays down specifically the demands of the unemployed:

1. A non-contributory and self-supporting scheme of ALL-IN SOCIAL INSURANCE covering National Health and Unemployment by the diverting of the yearly interest on the war debt of £300 millions to the present schemes.

2. The payment of a scale of benefits of 20s. per week to all adult unemployed over eighteen years of age, 10s. per wife and 5s. each child.

15s. per week to all unemployed between sixteen years and eighteen years, 10s. per week to those between fourteen years and sixteen years.

3. Abolition of all disqualifying restrictions and continuous benefit for every signing day.

4. To absorb the unemployed into industry and to compensate for increased production under rationalisation by the introduction of the seven-hour day in all industries.

"But" the reader may object, "I agree with these demands; I agree that they represent the minimum which every unemployed worker should have if he and his dependants are to live a decent, civilized life; but are they not rather extravagant; are they possible under present conditions? Has not Mr. Snowden said that 'the national position is so grave that drastic and disagreeable measures will have to be taken?'"

What are the facts? Are these demands unreal? Let us look at the figures. In the financial year March 30, 1930, to March 28th, 1931, £92,200,000 was paid out in unemployment benefit. In the same period the Unemployment Insurance Fund received £65.2 millions—£13.7 millions in workers' contributions, £16 millions from employers, and £35.5 millions from the State. In addition, with the leaping unemployment caused by the capitalist crisis, £35.6 millions was borrowed from the Treasury, leaving a slight surplus over the amount paid out. And it is this £92 millions that the Labour Government is determined to slash. Ninety-two million pounds a year to keep alive nearly eight million people—and capitalism says it can no longer afford to pay this amount.

Well, let us look at some of the amounts capitalism *can* afford to pay. First, how are the capitalists faring in this national crisis that, according to Snowden, "is so grave that drastic and disagreeable measures will have to be taken?" Look at super-tax incomes (over £2,000 a year). They have risen from £504 millions in 1920-21 to £541 millions in 1929-30. Fortunes left at death, subject to estate duty, have jumped from 391 millions in 1920-21 to £511 millions in 1927-28. And every year the Labour Government pays £350 millions—more than the total spent on "social services"—in interest on the War Debt of £7,000 millions. And Snowden's last Budget, when he declared that he expected the Royal Commission to help him to balance his accounts, allotted £111,000,000 for the Army, Navy and Air Force, in preparation for the next war. In addition, here are some further sums that the Labour Government *can* pay:

ANNUITIES PAID TO THE ROYAL FAMILY.

H.R.H. Princess Louise Caroline Alberta (Duchess of Argyll)	£6,000
H.R.H. Arthur William Patrick Albert (Duke of Connaught and Strathearn)	£25,000
H.R.H. Princess Beatrice Mary Victoria Feodora	£6,000
Trustees for the daughters of His late Majesty King Edward VII.	£18,000
Trustees for His Majesty's younger children	£51,000
Total	£106,000

SOME LEGAL PENSIONS

	Per year
Two late Lord Chancellors receive between them ..	£10,000
Three late Lords of Appeal receive between them ..	£11,250
One late Lord Chief Justice receives	£4,000
Four late Lord Justices of Appeal receive between them	£14,000
Five late Lord Justices, Chancery or King's Bench Division, receive between them	£17,500
Sixteen late County Court Judges receive between them	£14,450

No, no money for the unemployed but a million pounds a day to put into the pockets of the "patriotic leeches to pay for past imperialist wars, and two millions a week to prepare for the next war! Two shillings a week or £5 4s. a year to keep an unemployed worker's kiddie, and £106,000 a year for the children of the royal parasites! "Drastic and disagreeable measures" against the unemployed, while the profits of the super-tax payers who show their love of country by bleeding it white, swell year after year!

This is the answer of the working-class to capitalism's attack on the unemployed. Capitalism can, and can be made to, pay. The Labour Government can be compelled to let the Royal Commission's recommendations "lie on the table." We can force them to do this and to grant an adequate seal of benefit if we unite to struggle under the banner of the Workers' Charter. Let the slogan of every worker be:

"Not a penny for war: full benefits for the unemployed!"

THE PAMPHLETS IN THIS SERIES ARE:

- No. 1. **The Fight for the Workers' Charter.** By R. P. Dutt.
- No. 2. **The Real Scandal of the "Dole."** By Brennan Ward.
- No. 3. **The Seven Hour Day.** By J. R. Campbell.
- No. 4. **A Million Houses.** By H. P. Rathbone.
- No. 5. **Free the Colonies.** By R. P. Dutt.
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