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# Belgian Workers Face Wage Freeze

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# Belgian Workers Face Wage Freeze

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Transcribed & marked up by [Einde O'Callaghan](#) for the **Marxists' Internet Archive**.

BRUSSELS, Apr. 24 – The two major points of [our analysis of the current situation in Belgium](#), which appeared in **The Militant** of April 20, have just received rapid and striking confirmation. First, Van Acker has just proved that while he has been able to form a new government, it was only because the capitalists were compelled to have their "dirty job" done by "working class leaders." Second, the workers, on their side, have just proved that while they are in general little interested in the ups and downs in the political field, they react immediately and with admirable understanding to governmental measures in the sphere of prices and wages.

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## Government Promises

In the past months, reformist trade union leaders had promised the workers a rise in their standard of living through a progressive lowering of prices. The Stalinist leaders had demanded a modest increase of 10 or 15 per cent in wages.

Confronted with genuine distress among thousands of families of civil servants (postmen, railway workers, "temporary" employees, etc.), the government had developed a plan for raising payment classifications. Although the plan ignored a whole series of major demands of the workers, it provided an overall increase of five billion francs for hundreds of thousands of employees and workers in the state service.

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## The Bosses Command and Van Acker Acts

But the bosses are opposed even to these measures, modest as they are in the light of the real gap between prices and wages. (Wages are fixed at the index 220 with 1938 as base, whereas prices have risen to 400 or 450.) Several days before the time when the government's promises were to become effective, the reactionary press began a vigorous campaign against the "wasteful policy" of the government. At the same time speculators caused a drop in the price of government bonds on the Bourse.

Thereupon Van Acker became panicky. Capitulating before the pressure of the bosses and stockbrokers, he called reporters and trade union representatives to a conference. His statement had "the effect of an atomic bomb." He cynically acknowledged that prices, instead of declining, have continued to go up. He admitted that the black market had not disappeared but grown greater. How did he react to this situation ?

He announced that the wage freeze will be more rigorously enforced, that bosses allowing wage increases will be punished, and that only a billion, instead of five billion, will be given as wage increases to civil servants ! The only

thing he promised was a "rigorous control by "the government over prices" (!), when, according to his own admission, this same control has not prevented a continuous rise in the cost of living !

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## Stormy Working Class Reaction

As many as ten days before Van Acker's statement, the Belgian workers had begun, in some degree throughout the country, isolated actions for wage increases. Van Acker's statement unleashed a veritable storm of protest. Van Acker himself had to admit that Belgium is currently going through the "gravest social crisis," one equal to that of November 1944 (disarming of the partisans) and of May 1945 (miners' strike).

Strike movements have broken out in various coal pits at Borinage. Centre and Verviers. About 8,000 shipyard workers at Antwerp organized the most powerful working class demonstration that has been seen since "liberation," The streetcar conductors of Charleroi have stopped work. The threat of strike hangs over the metal works of Liege and Caroloringe. And finally, the civil service employees are preparing mass demonstrations at Brussels and Borinage while waiting for their union to decide whether or not it will call a strike.

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## Trade Union Leaders Want to Avoid Struggle

The Stalinist and reformist trade union leaders, completely tied to the policy of "class collaboration," want at all cost to avoid an extension of strike struggles which would endanger the "rebuilding of the country." It matters little to them that this "rebuilding" has up to now filled only the coffers of the capitalists, while the closets of the workers remain as empty as their wallets in the middle of the week.

It matters little to the Stalinist and reformist trade union heads that thousands of miners are used up at the age of 30, slowly murdered by silicosis and tied down to their homes with a miserable pension of four and a half dollars a week. At the same time, the "socialist" Van Acker goes to Lisbon to treat his sinuses !

In order to prevent once again a workers' revolt, the Stalinist and "socialist" labor leaders urge the workers to pin their hopes on the next "Labor Conference" which in two weeks will bring together representatives of the workers, bosses and government.

Trotskyist militants of the Internationalist Communist Party, whose patient propaganda has just received striking confirmation, are warning the workers that these discussions with the bosses and government agents will bring them nothing that they haven't already won through their own efforts in struggle.

Due to the complete failure of the trade union leaders to organize strike struggles, a tendency to quit the trade unions is becoming more and more apparent in the workers' ranks. STRIKE COMMITTEES must reappear and effectively lead the workers' battle FOR A SLIDING SCALE OF WAGES and FOR WORKERS' CONTROL OVER PRICES.

These are the Trotskyist slogans in the current crisis. The Trotskyists call on the Belgian workers to have no confidence either in the promises of the government or the maneuvers of the bureaucrats. Only general and united workers' action can result in victories. The most advanced elements of all the workers' parties and unions together

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with the Trotskyist militants must prepare for this action.

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