

PEOPLE'S VOICE

VOL. V., No. 12

AUCKLAND, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1947

PRICE 3d.

FIRE TRAGEDY MUST NOT BE REPEATED

DANGEROUS POSITION LAID BARE

New Zealand mourns at the Christchurch fire tragedy in which so many lives were cut off in the disaster at Ballantyne's drapery store.

To the relatives and friends of the unfortunate people who lost their lives, the "People's Voice" extends its deepest sympathy.

It feels, however, that sympathy is inadequate and that it is necessary to take practical and immediate measures to minimise the possibility of such a tragedy happening again. It is five years since the terrible tragedy at the Seaciff Mental Hospital in which many lost their lives. There is no reason, unfortunately, for confidence that another such tragedy as that which occurred at Ballantyne's might not occur again in some part of New Zealand at any time.

MANY DEATH-TRAPS EXIST

Enquiries and observations made by the "People's Voice" reveal that an extremely dangerous position exists in the cities of New Zealand. Many large stores and other buildings are unduly subjected to fire hazard and, in the event of fire breaking out, would be death-traps. The "People's Voice" does not desire that there should be undue alarm over the position, but it is obvious that quick action must be taken to minimise fire risks in many important buildings, particularly of the older type.

The danger is particularly acute in older buildings which were not built according to the requirements of modern fire regulations. It would be impracticable to abandon all these buildings, but it is certain that much could be done even in these older buildings to minimise the risk attendant on fire.

FIRE ESCAPES LACKING

The absence of fire-escapes at Ballantyne's, which was obvious even to people outside Christchurch, from newspaper accounts and photographs, is only too common to buildings in Auckland, Wellington and other cities. Comment was made to the "People's Voice" concerning the large establishment in Queen Street, Auckland. It was pointed

out that there were no fire-escapes leading from the windows facing Queen Street. A similar position exists elsewhere. In some of these cases it was obvious that lives might be lost on a scale comparable or worse than at Ballantyne's.

While the ultimate solution lies in the building of modern concrete structures without inflammable floors and walls and fittings, much could be immediately done by conforming to the regulations regarding fire-escapes, by installing automatic sprinklers, by compulsory fire drill and other such measures.

COMMISSION MUST BE EFFECTIVE

The commission of enquiry which has been promised by the Hon. W. Parry will doubtless go thoroughly into the circumstances surrounding the fire at Ballantyne's, and the "People's Voice" does not wish to pre-judge the issue. The whole question of fire hazard, however, is one of acute and immediate importance to the working class and to the general public. Commissions of enquiry in the past have been set up on various questions under pressure of disaster or public opinion and their findings have remained a dead letter.

This must not happen again. The shop assistants' unions, the



The above photograph shows the Cashel Street frontage of the drapery establishment of J. Ballantyne and Co., Christchurch, where so many lives were lost in a disastrous fire. Readers will note that, as in so many other similar buildings, there are no fire-escapes on this frontage. See article on this page. (Green and Hahn, photograph)

Clerical Workers' Union, the Storemen and Packers' Union, and other unions of workers, cannot allow this matter to be dealt with in a superficial manner.

These unions, and the Federation of Labour, should be given representation on the commission which is being set up by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. W. Parry.

French Workers Fight Fascism's New Threat

LONDON.—While Truman and other Wall Street politicians try to rush through the Marshall plan to buy up Europe, the French and Italian Governments have launched an attack on the trade unions, Communist Parties and other organisations which aim to preserve their countries' independence.

But French and Italian democrats, schooled in the underground struggle against the Nazis, are hitting back in a wave of strikes and demonstrations greater than anything their countries have known since 1848.

The French reaction began its offensive with the arrest and savage sentencing of Marseilles workers who were taking part in a peaceable demonstration against increasing prices.

The Ramadier Government then launched a deliberately provocative raid against the Soviet P.O.W. repatriation camp at Beauregard, near Paris.

ARCOS RAID RECALLED

This raid, reminiscent of the famous Arcos raid in London in 1927, is obviously designed to force a breach of relations between Russia and France.

The camp was being maintained in Paris, by agreement with the French Government, to repatriate the thousands of Soviet P.O.W.'s

with a scare story about the "Reds" plotting to attack France.

Under cover of the panic thus created, the Socialist Ramadier aimed to make way for "strong men" who might in turn be expected to prepare the way for Fascist de Gaulle.

De Gaulle would do the main job of smashing all French resistance to Wall Street's plan to enslave France and seize her strategic bases and colonial resources for a war against the Soviet Union.

Reynaud was the sawdust Caesar who undermined France's defences in 1940, allowing traitor generals to open the gates to the Nazis and appointed Petain as vice-Premier, from which position he opened up talks with the German generals. De Gaulle, Reynaud appointed himself as his

Bruce Skilton Turns Tables On "Standard" Editor

"The 'Standard's' allegation of Communist trickery in the issuing of an election ticket cannot be supported by facts," said Bruce Skilton, District Secretary of the Communist Party in Wellington. "The Communist ticket, in marked contrast to the ticket issued by the Labour Party, plainly indicates that it is issued by the Communist Party.

On one side the ticket bears the names of the Communist candidates, Mrs. C. Birchfield and W. Ara, with the slogan 'Communist for Leadership.' On the other side it is headed 'How to Vote on November 19th,' 'Communist Recommendations.'

In the case of the City Council, voters are advised to 'vote for Communists and thirteen others.' The names of thirteen other candidates are then set out in alphabetical order, with the two

reason for the wild charges made in the 'Standard's' editorial attack on the Communist Party. The Labour



Party should be the last to accuse the Communist Party of trickery, for the Labour Party is the only organisation in Wellington standing candidates to issue a ticket that does not bear its name or a clear indication of its origin. These are your candidates' is the caption on its ticket, and a list of candidates for the various bodies is then set out.

"One cannot but agree with the Mayor, Mr. Appleton, when he said: 'The Labour candidates in Wellington are ashamed of their political label for they had issued a list on an anonymous ticket.'

"As the Labour candidate for the Mayoralty, Mr. N. R. Seddon, was forced to publicly admit 'any band