

The Aims of Labor.

(By Right Hon. Arthur Henderson, M.P.)

With the coming of peace the world will enter upon an era of revolutionary change to which there is no parallel in history. In this country, as in every other, the war has already profoundly modified the economic system of pre-war days, and has introduced far-reaching innovations into industry. Methods of State control which would once have been regarded as intolerable infringements of the rights and liberties both of employers and workmen, have been accepted without effective protest even from those bred in the individualist tradition of the last century. Some of these changes are admittedly only temporary and provisional. They were dictated by national necessity and were introduced upon the explicit understanding that an unprecedented situation had arisen which called for bold and drastic measures. These measures, which relate to trade union practices and customs in the workshops, in particular, are governed by strict pledges for the restoration of pre-war conditions when the national crisis is over. Nevertheless, the extent and importance of these changes in methods of production, the control of industry, the management and distribution of labor, and the limitations imposed upon the activities of financiers and the enterprises of individual capitalists, practically involve a revolution, the effects of which will remain when the necessity which gave them their sanction has passed away. Most of them are permanent. In four crowded and eventful years we have gathered the fruits of a century of economic evolution. We have entered upon a new world. With the main features of the new world we are still unfamiliar. We cannot yet begin to measure the material effects of the war upon the commercial and the industrial system upon which our civilization has been based.

A New Social Order.

Still less can we estimate the results of the inner revolution of thought and feeling which has accompanied these material changes. Yet we are beginning dimly to see that the old order of society has dissolved. A new social order is taking shape even in the midst of the stress and peril of the time. The revolution is fundamental, for it touches the springs of action in the great mass of the common people. Greater changes in the material structure of society have still to come, but they will be dictated not by the exigencies of war, but by the new democratic consciousness and the new social conscience which have come to birth in the long agony of the present struggle. The people have been taught by events, better than by any process of rational argument, that they alone make war possible though they have no hand in fashioning the policies that lead to war; their energy, devotion and sacrifice, in trench, field and factory are qualities which their rulers exploit when they quarrel with one another. In time of peace the people feel that they are nothing; when war comes they are found to be everything. War is possible only because the skill and bravery of the common people, their immense industry, their patient endurance, their direct and simple sense of right and wrong, give the world's rulers a feeling of power which they use not to ensure the happiness and

prosperity of the multitudes of humble folk, but to glorify their own names and to feed their insensate ambitions. The people have discovered this, and in learning it they have discovered their power. Never again, we may be sure, will the people allow themselves to be driven helplessly into war by these sinister forces. Neither will they be able henceforth to see as enemies the people of other countries who are like themselves, the victims of militarist imprisonment and secret diplomacy of their rulers.

Internationalism.

Internationalism, as an organized movement, may have temporarily broken down in this war. But the spirit of internationalism, the consciousness of the solidarity of peoples, the democratic vision which overlooks the artificial frontiers which keep the people apart, will grow stronger the longer the war continues. In the midst of the universal horror of the battlefield something like an entente of the peoples has been established. The democracies of the world begin to understand one another. Some of the old misunderstandings and prejudices, intensified by the bitterness of the present mad struggle, may flourish for some time after the war. Old jealousies die hard, new hatreds have been born. Human nature is human nature still. But beneath these unnatural enmities, transcending the passionate antagonisms of the hour, new forces of fraternity and goodwill are at work, reconciling the sundered peoples and making a coveted peace possible between them, more durable than the treaty of peace that the official diplomacy will presently conclude. In every belligerent country these healing and unifying forces have been released. Nowhere—not even in Russia—are they dominant, but the democratic spirit is permeating every country. Democratic conceptions are influencing the thought of every people, who see the war as the last monstrous product of economic and social inequalities of the old order of existence, which dissolves and passes away like a dream of the night.

Not a New Conception.

Equality is a great human formula of the coming era of revolutionary change. We are moving swiftly towards a new order of society in which the idea of equality will govern the political thinking of all democracies. The freedom and fraternity of which men have dreamed, which we desire to see established in this country and extended to every other, so that there may be no more wars, are rooted in equality. It is not a new conception. It has inspired democratic action since democracy first took shape as an organized movement. It has been the aim of trade unionism from the earliest beginnings, though it may not have been consciously formulated. It has been the aspirations of the political democracy. The war has quickened it afresh and has invested it with a new significance. Failure to appreciate the fact that the minds of the people have been deeply influenced by equalitarian ideals, to underestimate the popular resentment of class privileges, whether based on accident of birth or upon the possession of wealth, which the war has strengthened rather than mitigated, will be fatal in future to

governments and political parties alike. These are the conceptions which will determine the politics of the future. Where does the Labor Party stand in relation to them, and to the vast range of problems, international and national, political, social and economic, the solution of which will be conditioned by them? Is the labor movement so organized and equipped as to qualify it to interpret and direct the new consciousness of democracy?

Sixteen Million Electors.

The answer to this question is not difficult. An examination of the present political labor movement will suffice to show that the form of organization must be completely changed if it is to be enabled to meet the requirements of the new situation. It is a fact of enormous importance that the development of democratic ideals and purpose synchronizes with the introduction of a franchise measure which opens up a tremendous vista of political achievement. When the new act comes into operation, it is estimated that the number of voters will be increased by 2,000,000 men and 6,000,000 women—a million of the latter being unmarried women—making a total of sixteen and a quarter million electors. These figures do not represent the actual improvement in the position of political democracy brought about by the Reform Bill, for many registration anomalies and disqualifications are removed; and thus a considerable increase in the number of electors in the "live" register able to take part in elections may be anticipated. To meet this great change in the character of the electorate, and to take full advantage of the redistribution of political power, our present form of organization is plainly inadequate.

Trade Union Congress Jubilee.

Measured by the extended history of trade union organizations in this country, the political labor movement is of very recent origin. This year the Trade Union Congress celebrates its jubilee. As a distinct and separate group in parliament the Labor Party, on the other hand, has not attained its majority. It was the activity of the Socialist pioneers in this country which supplied the final impulse to political action on the part of the organized working class movement. It is true that after the passing of the Reform Act in 1868, which enfranchised the workmen in the boroughs, a movement was started to secure the return of trade union members to parliament. In 1874 fourteen candidates went to the poll, but only two were returned, including the Right Hon. Thomas Burt, M. P., the present father of the House. In 1880 the number was increased to three; in 1885 to eleven in 1892 to fourteen; but in 1895 the number was reduced to twelve. The conjunction of the Socialist and the industrial movements, however, caused the pace to quicken. Alone, the Socialist propagandists seemed to be condemned to political futility. In 1885, for example, the old Social Democratic Federation ran two candidates—one at Kennington and the other at Hampstead; the candidate at Kennington received thirty-two votes, the candidate at Hampstead polled twenty-nine. The foundation of the independent Labor Party in 1893, as a result of the propaganda of the Fabians and the old S.D.F., prepared the ground for the decision of the Trade Union Congress in 1899, when a resolution was adopted directing the Parliamentary Committee to arrange a conference of the trade unionists and Socialist societies "to devise ways and means of securing an increased number of labor members in Parliament." A year later the Labor Representation Committee was formed and a distinct labor group came into existence in Parliament, on independent lines, with its own whips and its own policy.

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Labor to Create New Order.

The form of organization adopted indicates quite clearly that at that time the creation of a national party was not contemplated. What was then formed was a separate group, not a democratic political party capable of challenging the two historic parties on their own ground. After the special conference in 1899, the Labor Party took shape as a federation of trade unions, Socialist societies, trades councils and local labor parties, and co-operative societies. It was not until 1903 that the candidates of the Labor Representation Committee obtained any notable success at the polls. Between the general elections of 1900 and 1906 three remarkable victories were obtained. Mr. (now Sir David) Shackleton was returned unopposed for Clitheroe; Mr. Will Crooks won Woolwich from the Unionist Party; and I had the pleasure of beating both the Tory and Liberal candidates at Barnard Castle. In 1906 the party promoted fifty candidates at the general election, and twenty-nine of them were successful at the polls; in January, 1910, seventy-eight candidates ran under the auspices of the party, and forty were returned; at the last general election in December, 1910, fifty-six candidates were nominated and forty-two were returned. In Parliament these members formed a separate and independent group. But they were not a party, in the accepted sense of the word, and some of them had not shaken off their allegiance to the historic parties. In the country, though, we maintained our own electoral machinery and our own staff of organizers the organization was essentially a federation of local and national societies. When the war came it was made clear that this form of organization had elements of weakness which the less serious stresses of peace times had not revealed. As the war wore on, and the democratic will became stronger, we were led to see that if Labor is to take part in creating the new order of society it must address itself to the task of transforming its political organization from a federation of societies into a national popular party, rooted in the life of the democracy and deriving its principles and its policies from the new political consciousness.

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THEIR MASTER'S VOICE.

Li Hung Chang went to Clydebank, Scotland. The breakfast horn sounded. Thousands of workers ran home along the streets. The Celestial was amazed.

An hour later the horn blew again, and again thousands of workers hurried and scrambled back to the factory.

"Order a thousand of these horns for China," cried Li Hung Chang.

Patriotism—national feeling—is a great quality, but there is something, if not nobler, at any rate wider and more generous: in the present state of the world more necessary and yet unfortunately much rarer, and that is international good feeling.—Lord Avebury.