

# The Aims of Labor.

(By Right Hon. Arthur Henderson,

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FREEDOM.

It is a tragic paradox that in the great struggle for freedom and democracy the British people have been required to surrender many of their cherished liberties. The nation's willingness to submit to restrictions imposed by authority upon the right of democratic self-determination which has been its chief pride and boast for many centuries is a more convincing proof of its resolute intention to achieve victory than even the sacrificial service of the men in the field and the workers at home. It is questionable, indeed, whether many of the limitations upon freedom were necessary; but it is indisputable that only a people motivated by the purest patriotism, and resolved to allow nothing to weaken the national will, would have accepted them. At any other time the State's encroachment upon the domain of private liberty would have been instantly challenged. It was not because the British people were convinced that the surrender of democratic rights was necessary that they yielded without a struggle, but because they realised they could not prosecute two wars simultaneously. Having resolved to defeat Prussianism abroad because it menaced the freedom of the whole world, they tolerated the curtailment of their liberties at home as a relative danger with which they could more conveniently deal when the bigger peril was removed. Reaction has made great strides during the war. The people know that they are in the grip of reaction. But it would be a disastrous error to conclude that democracy has been so firmly fettered that it will not be able to shake off its bonds when the hour comes for it to reckon with its domestic enemies. The very submission of the people, their acceptance of one outrageous restriction after another, may lead the reactionaries to think their policy has succeeded: when the greater preoccupation of the war is over they will perhaps see how completely it has failed.

What are the reactionary encroachments upon liberty against which democracy may justly protest? We do not complain so much of the formal restrictions imposed upon the people of this country on the plea of national necessity, but of the subtler inroads upon both private and public liberty through a reactionary and oppressive interpretation of the long series of regulations introduced during the war. Take first the freedom of the press. An intelligent censorship which confined its activities to the suppression of news that might assist the military effort of the enemy would be regarded as performing a legitimate duty; but the military censorship has developed into a wonderful political engine which enables the authorities systematically to control the press. It enables the executive not merely to control opinion but to manufacture it. On the one hand it prevents free discussion of questions of public policy; on the other it guides the public mind by means of a steady stream of artful suggestion and official "information" manipulated and coloured in accordance with official views. The seizure

of pamphlets, the suppression of newspapers, the attempt to bring under the survey of the censorship every leaflet, pamphlet, and printed sheet dealing however remotely with questions of war and peace, are only additional illustrations of this dangerous development by which truth is rationed, political opinion made to order in government factories, and an artificial unity created by the simple expedient of denying expression to dissident views. The practical denial of free speech and the right of public meeting, both by direct prohibition and by the far worse method of permitting meetings to be broken up by organised violence, is another development against which democracy is bound to protest. Still more sinister is the growth of espionage and police inquisition: the adoption of continental methods of surveillance represents an invasion of private life by the agents of authority which before the war one would have confidently declared this country would never tolerate. The right of asylum, under which many political refugees sought shelter from the harsh oppression of their own Governments, has been destroyed. The right of trial by jury and of public trial has been virtually superseded, and the detention of suspected persons without trial and without formal charge being made against them shows how far the executive has gone in defiance of the constitutional safeguards which protected the person and property of British citizens. New tribunals, unknown to the British legal system, and answerable only to the Government, have been set up for dealing with new offences, established principles of our juridical system, well attested rights of accused persons, have been arbitrarily set aside.

Before the war the workers enjoyed a considerable measure of personal and collective freedom, as workers not simply as citizens: they were not bound to one employer or confined to one district, but might go where the highest wages invited and in the last resort could enforce their claims for improved conditions by ceasing to work. These rights have disappeared. Many workshop practices and customs which protected the workmen have been abandoned. That in the latter instance the workmen and their representatives have agreed to these limitations and restrictions does not weaken the assertion that they represent a serious diminution of the workers' freedom. With a patriotic self-devotion beyond all praise the organised workers have consented to abandon many of the guarantees which they had devised to protect them from the rapacity of the employers; but it cannot be denied that the manner in which their readiness to sacrifice their rights, including their right to decide for whom they shall work and under what conditions, has been exploited in the interest of reaction, has given rise to much suspicion of discontent. This very human reaction against all these legislative and administrative experiments is the measure of their failure. It proves that they have gone too far, are too harsh and oppressive in their working. They have given the workers a sense of being harried, controlled,

and disposed of without any reference to their own wishes and frequently against their will. That is the root of the resentment and distrust which the organised workers now show. It is the reason why they scrutinise with jealous suspicion every proposal put forward by the Government for the further organisation of the nation's reserves of man-power.

Not only the steadily deepening revolt of the organised workers but the equally marked degeneration of public moral and the loss of popular confidence in the Government, must be taken as further evidence of the total practical failure of this policy of repression and regimentation. In the early days of the war, those who, like myself, felt that the righteousness of our cause justified and indeed demanded every sacrifice, accepted the restrictions which the Government proposed as a necessary expedient for the vigorous prosecution of the war; and we have to bear our share of responsibility if we failed to perceive every possibility of abuse underlying the legal phrases in which the proposals were embodied. But democracy in war times is at a disadvantage in dealing with abuses or excesses of authority; its moral simplicity and singleness of aim put democracy in the power of its enemies. The same qualities will deliver it when the lesson of this experience of what reaction can do, how craftily the enemy of freedom can plot the destruction of popular liberties in the very hour when the people are making unprecedented sacrifices in order to preserve freedom and extend its boundaries, has been learned. The people's sacrifice of their rights and liberties was sanctioned by motives of the purest patriotism. Those of us who counselled and encouraged the sacrifice when authoritative voices warned us that only so could the war be won have no reason to be ashamed: the shame rather lies with those who under cover of the plea of national necessity formulated regulations that have been a weapon in the hands of reaction for the subversion of civil liberty.

While we recognise that the logic of military defence is the logic of restriction, of authority against liberty, and acknowledge the difficulty of defining the limits of such control as a Government must claim when a nation is at war, we proclaim that the democratic ideal of freedom is not the freedom of a people in barracks or a besieged city, but of equality and mutual service. Militarist authority implies subservience and regimentation. Democracy demands the right of self-determination and the opportunity to realise through its own culture and institutions the fullest possibilities of self-development. The era of democratic freedom will not be inaugurated merely by a suspension of the war restrictions. It will be the function of the builders of the new order of society to discover the influences that constrain freedom and by combined effort to destroy them. Democracy asserts that brute force should not be the arbiter in the relation of States, and therefore seeks to embody the principle of conciliation in international institutions. As the spirit of democracy will inform these international institutions and national self-determination is the guiding principle they will be the protectors of national freedom; and democracy, which is nourished on publicity, will demand that the free

air of public discussion shall penetrate the obscurities of diplomacy. We realise further that there can be no true freedom so long as property and power are concentrated in the hands of a few, and the democratic watchword for the struggle of the future is "Through Equality to Freedom." We look to the democratisation of political institutions through a still wider extension of the franchise, the abolition of secret political funds, derived from the traffic in honours and to the growth of industrial democracy, to enlarge the boundaries of freedom in this land, and to give the individual citizen a deeper sense of power and responsibility as the attributes of a free man. We know, too, that as the price of liberty is perpetual vigilance, so its surest safeguard is the passion for liberty in the hearts of men and women. To save this nation from the moral and political servitude which makes the masses of people helpless agents of their own destruction and puts into the hands of the new more than the power of life and death is the settled resolve of organised democracy.

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## GREAT BRITAIN WILL TRY NEW DEMOCRACY.

Parliamentary Electorate Doubled at a Stroke — Six Million to Vote at Next Election.

A measure which doubles at a stroke the parliamentary electorate, enfranchises six million women, provides for absent (and even proxy) voting by three million soldiers and sailors, redistributes seven hundred parliamentary seats, introduces a scheme of proportional representation, paves the way for a new balance of party forces, and in short, throws open the floodgate for democracy in a great conservative nation—such is the British "Representation of the People" Act, which received the royal assent on Feb. 6.

Two years of war brought the advocates of woman's suffrage an advantage which no amount of agitation had ever won for them, namely, the backing of the government; and a few months more carried their cause to a victorious conclusion which could hardly have been reached in a full decade of peace. Now that men were to have the suffrage as persons, it was more than ever difficult to withhold it from women. Indeed, in the present juncture—in the face of woman's incalculable service to the nation—to withhold it is quite impossible.

The effect of these stupendous changes upon the relative strength of parties, and upon the course of British legislation and politics, remains to be determined. No one doubts that Britain is headed toward a mighty political and economic overturn in consequence of the war. To a considerable extent, the revolution has already been accomplished. It has been charged that the driving force behind the suffrage clauses of the late act was the Labor Party, which expects to turn the new stream of electoral power to account in winning the coveted control of the nation's affairs. This is at best but a half-truth. Yet it is not to be doubted that the mass of the newly enfranchised women, are of liberal, and in many cases radical bent.—

By Frederick Austin Ogg in Review of Reviews.