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Labour and its

Economic Problems.

The following article covers

in a most concise manner the

problems which face British In-

dustries to-day, and the extent

to which the difficulties have

been aggravated by the dis-

turbances in Labour circles is

clearly explained. It is taken

from Siren and Shipping and

was written by Sir John Latta,

Bart., senior Partner of the

firm of Lawther Latta and

Company, Shipowners. During

the war both he and his brother

rendered valuable services to the

country by their voluntary as-

sistance to the Ministry of Ship-

ping, in which Department the

latter was assistant director of

the Ship Management Board.

The Prime Minister in a recent

public utterance drew attention

to the fact that formerly the various

States of the American Republic

were a series of autonomous ter-

ritories and had discriminatory

tariffs against one another. These

tariffs were eventually broken down,

and the "United States of America,"

as we know them to-day, followed.

He also alluded to the fact that the

immensity of the British Empire sug-

gested a parallel with the great Amer-

ican federation. This comparison,

however, appears to be hardly ap-

propriate. The case of the British

United States are all joined to one

another, and represent within them-

selves the greatest Free Trade area

in the world. They form part of the

same continental block, and their

several sections are interconnected

by a wonderful network of rail

transport. In the case of the British

Empire, some of the Dominions,

however, are separated by as much

as 12,000 miles of sea. For the paral-

lel to hold good the geographical dis-

tance between the various parts of

the British Empire would have to be

eliminated, or, at all events, we would

have to provide such means of cheap

transport as to be equivalent to this

if we are to convert the Empire into

a United States. Any country which

ignores the geographical distance

between the various parts of the

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means explain away the serious de-

fects of our economic system, the

whole structure of which is charac-

terized with the recalcitrancy of Labour.

Without going into ancient history I

would like to point out that we have

during recent years been confronted

with the deplorable failure of Lab-

our and its leaders to recognize the

signs of the situation and to adapt

themselves to modern necessities and

requirements. The attitude of the

bricklayers in face of the extreme ur-

gency of the housing problem cannot

be forgotten. Not only did they re-

fuse to work on the basis of a re-

duced number of bricks they were

allowed to lay per hour or per day,

but they absolutely refused, though

there was a shortage of labour, to

allow ex-Service men to come to

their assistance. Two years ago we

had the disastrous millers' strike,

which held up the engineering in-

dustries throughout the country.

Last year the shipping industry was

disorganized by the ionian strike,

which paralyzed trade and drove it

on to the Continent and enabled

foreign workers to carry on while

ours were reduced to the verge of

starvation. Now we have just

emerged from the still more disas-

trous "lock-out" of the coal-miners,

the consequences of which are quan-

tifiably incalculable and, unfortun-

ately, cumulative in their dire effect. In

fact, the attitude of Labour in this

country has become a byword

throughout the world, and with re-

gard to the so-called leadership of

those who organize labour and are

supposed to direct its energies into

right channels, it is a case of the

blind leading the blind. It seems to

me in this connection that we have

been sheltering behind tariff

walls, the consequence would im-

mediately have been a demand on the

part of Labour for higher wages and

then a request from manufacturers for

a higher duty, and so on, until we

are as a nation in our protective

system as America. Another re-

markable aspect of the present situa-

tion is the utter bankruptcy of Lab-

our's economic policy which "reduce

the grievous amount of unemploy-

ment and prevent the trade of the

country from going from bad to

worse. The main plank in their

platform is not construction, but de-

struction. I allude, of course, to

that fatal and empiricist alleged

specific, the Capital Levy. I am

thoroughly convinced that as a re-

sult of such an act of spoliation, our

trade, our manufacturing industries,

our shipping, and, in fact, our na-

tional prosperity—even in its present

attenuated dimensions—would in-

evitably vanish.

"And like an insubstantial pageant

faded.

Leave not a wrack behind."

So sensitive is international capital,

that interests which the levy would

not even touch would suffer through

sheer nervousness on the part of

those engaged in its manipulation. I

recall the stress upon the techni-

cal objections to a capital levy.

These require no reiteration, as they

have so often been exposed. Had

labour been forced to face reality, it

would have seen that the levy would

represent a far greater strain on the

nation than the obligations attached

to the 2,500,000,000 owing to our-

selves—it would have shown some-

what of the insanity of the levy.

In fact, this insane remedy

may be compared with that of a

traveller who sold his coat to pay

part of a debt he owed. As the fal-

lacies of a capital levy are so appar-

ent, I cannot refrain from believing

that the Labour Party have not the

real interests of the country at

heart at all or they would never

have evolved such a scheme. What

is wanted is the education of the un-

thinking section of the community to

the fact that the levy is now at grips

with the economic forces of the coun-

try. In this struggle for existence, the

gravity of which is but faintly real-

ized by our industrial workers, I am

not an alarmist, but in the absence of

recognition of our true position that

will enable us to keep our heads

above water, Labour leaders must

accept world-trade conditions as they

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