

# LABOR and the NEW SOCIAL ORDER

It behooves the Labor party, in formulating its own programme for reconstruction after the war and in criticizing the various preparations and plans that are being made by the present government, to look at the problem as a whole. We have to make clear what it is that we wish to construct. It is important to emphasize the fact that, whatever may be the case with regard to other political parties, our detailed practical proposals proceed from definitely held principles.

## THE END OF CIVILIZATION.

We need to beware of patchwork. The view of the Labor party is that what has to be reconstructed after the war is not this or that government department, or this or that piece of social machinery; but, so far as Britain is concerned, society itself. The individual worker, or for that matter the individual statesman, immersed in daily routine—like the individual soldier in a battle—easily fails to understand the magnitude and far-reaching importance of what is taking place around him. How does it fit together as a whole? How does it look from a distance? Count Okuma, one of the oldest, most experienced and ablest of the statesmen of Japan, watching the present conflict from the other side of the globe, declares it to be nothing less than the death of European civilization. Just as in the past the civilization of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Carthage and the great Roman Empire have been successively destroyed, so, in the judgment of this detached observer, the civilization of all Europe is even now receiving its death blow. We of the Labor party can so far agree in this estimate as to recognize in the present world catastrophe, if not the death, in Europe, of civilization itself, at any rate the culmination and collapse of a distinctive industrial civilization, which the workers will not seek to reconstruct. At such times of crisis it is easier to slip into ruin than to progress into higher forms of organization. That is the problem as it presents itself to the Labor party.

What this war is consuming is not merely the security, the homes, the livelihood and the lives of millions of innocent families, and an enormous proportion of all the accumulated wealth of the world, but also the very basis of the peculiar social order in which it has arisen. The individualist system of capitalist production, based on the private ownership and competitive administration of land and capital, with its reckless "profiteering" and wage-slavery; with its glorification of the unhampered struggle for the means of life and its hypocritical pretense of the "survival of the fittest"; with the monstrous inequality of circumstances which it produces and the degradation and brutalization, both moral and spiritual, resulting therefrom, may, we hope, indeed have received a death blow. With it must go the political system and ideas in which it naturally found expression. We of the Labor party, whether in opposition or in due time called upon to form an administration, will certainly lend no hand to its revival. On the contrary, we shall do our utmost to see that it is buried with the millions whom it has done to death. If we in Britain are to escape from the decay of civilization itself, which the Japanese statesman foresees, we must insure that what is presently to be built up is a new social order, based not on fighting, but on fraternity—not on the competitive struggle for the means of bare life, but on a deliberately planned co-operation in production and distribution for the benefit of all who participate by hand or by brain—not on the utmost possible inequality of riches, but on a systematic approach towards a healthy equality of material circumstances for every person born into the world—not on an enforced dominion over subject nations, subject races, subject colonies, subject classes, or a subject sex, but, in industry as well as in government, on that equal freedom, that general consciousness of consent, and that widest possible participation of power, both economic and political, which is characteristic of democracy. We do not, of course,

## THE BRITISH LABOR PROGRAMME.

The programme, now under consideration by the Labor Board of Great Britain, reproduced herewith, is a document worthy of patient and painstaking examination by every Canadian. It has been drafted by the executive, but not yet formally adopted by the British Labor party. It is a programme of reconstruction designed to create a new social order in Great Britain. It shows a breadth of vision and humanitarian viewpoint altogether new in political programmes. The Labor party of Britain is very powerful. The new

Franchise Act passed in the last few months gives the vote to millions of men and women in Britain who never before voted. The probability of a general election within a few months is strong. It is quite within the range of possibility that the election will place a Labor government in power, or if not, the Labor party in almost certain to hold the balance of power. In the light of these facts, the political programme of the Labor party becomes doubly significant and much more worthy of study.

pretend that it is possible, even after the drastic clearing away that is now going on, to build society anew in a year or two of feverish "reconstruction." What the Labor party intends to satisfy itself about is that each brick that it helps to lay shall go to erect the structure that it intends, and no other.

## THE PILLARS OF THE HOUSE.

We need not here recapitulate, one by one, the different items in the Labor party's programme, which successive party conferences have adopted. These proposals, some of them in various publications worked out in practical detail, are often carelessly derided as impracticable, even by the politicians who steal them piecemeal from us! The members of the Labor party, themselves actually working by hand or by brain, in close contact with the facts, have perhaps at all times a more accurate appreciation of what is practicable, in industry as in politics, than those who depend solely on the academic instruction or are biased by great possessions. But to-day no man dares to say that anything is impracticable. The war which has scared the old political parties right out of their dogmas, has taught every statesman and every government official, to his enduring surprise, how very much more can be done along the lines that we have laid down than he had ever before thought possible. What we now promulgate as our policy, whether for opposition or for office, is not merely this or that specific reform, but a deliberately thought out, systematic, and comprehensive plan for that immediate social rebuilding which any ministry, whether or not it desires to grapple with the problem, will be driven to undertake. The four pillars of the house that we propose to erect, resting upon the common foundation of the democratic control of society in all its activities, may be termed:

- (a) The Universal Enforcement of the National Minimum;
- (b) The Democratic Control of Industry;
- (c) The Revolution in National Finance; and
- (d) The Surplus Wealth for the Common Good.

## THE UNIVERSAL ENFORCEMENT OF A NATIONAL MINIMUM.

The first principle of the Labor party—in significant contrast with those of the capitalist system, whether expressed by the Liberal or by the Conservative party—is the securing to every member of the community, in good times and bad alike (and not only to the strong and able the well born or the fortunate), of all the requisites of healthy life and worthy citizenship. This is in no sense a "class" proposal. Such an amount of social protection of the individual, however poor and lowly, from birth to death, is, as the economist now knows, as indispensable to fruitful co-operation as it is to successful combination; and it affords the only complete safeguard against that insidious degradation of the standard of life which is the worst economic and social calamity to which any community can be subjected. We are members one of another. No man liveth to himself alone. If any, even the humblest, is made to suffer, the whole community and every one of us, whether or not we recognize the fact, is thereby injured. Generation after generation this has been the corner-stone of the faith of Labor. It will be the guiding principle of any Labor government.

## THE LEGISLATIVE REGULATION OF EMPLOYMENT.

Thus it is that the Labor party to-day stands for the universal application of the policy of the national minimum, to which (as embodied in the successive elaborations of the Factory, Mines, Railways, Shops, Merchant Shipping and Truck Acts, the Public Health, Housing and Education Acts and the Minimum Wage Act—all of them aiming at the enforcement of at least the prescribed minimum of leisure, health, education and subsistence) the spokesmen of Labor have already gained the support of the enlightened statesmen and economists of the world. All these laws purporting to protect against extreme degradation of the standard of life need considerable improvement and extension, whilst their administration leaves much to be desired. For instance, the Workmen's Compensation Act fails shamefully, not merely to secure proper provision for all the victims of accident and industrial disease, but what is much more important, does not succeed in preventing their continual increase. The amendment and consolidation of the Factory and Workshops Acts, with their extension to all employed persons, is long overdue, and it will be the policy of Labor greatly to strengthen the staff of inspectors, especially by the addition of more men and women of actual experience of the workshop and the mine. The Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act must certainly be maintained in force, and suitably amended, so as both to ensure greater uniformity of conditions among the several districts, and to make the district minimum in all cases an effective reality. The same policy will, in the interests of the agricultural laborers, dictate the perpetuation of the legal wage clauses of the new Corn Law just passed for a term of five years, and the prompt amendment of any defects that may be revealed in their working. And, in view of the fact that many millions of wage-earners, notably women and the less skilled workmen in various occupations, are unable by combination to obtain wages adequate for decent maintenance in health, the Labor party intends to see to it that the Trade Boards Act is suitably amended and made to apply to all industrial employments in which any considerable number of those employed obtain less than 30s. per week (which will need revision according to the level of prices) ought to be the very lowest statutory base line for the least skilled adult workers, men or women, in any occupation, in all parts of the United Kingdom.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF DEMOBILIZATION.

But the coming industrial dislocation, which will inevitably follow the discharge from war service of half of all the working population, imposes new obligations upon the community. The demobilization and discharge of the eight million wage-earners now being paid from public funds, either for service with the colors or in munition work and other war trades, will bring to the whole wage-earning class grave peril of unemployment, reduction of wages, and a lasting degradation of the standard of life, which can be prevented only by deliberate national organization. The Labor party has repeatedly called upon the present government to formulate a plan, and to make in advance all arrangements necessary for coping with so unparalleled a dislocation. The policy to

which the Labor party commits itself is unhesitating and uncompromising. It is plain that regard should be had, in stopping government orders, reducing the staff of the national factories and demobilizing the army, to the actual state of employment in particular industries and in different districts, so as both to release first the kinds of labor most urgently required for the revival of peace production, and to prevent any congestion of the market. It is no less imperative that suitable provision against being turned suddenly adrift without resources should be made, not only for the soldiers, but also for the three million operatives in munition work and other war trades, who will be discharged long before most of the army can be disbanded. On this important point, which is the most urgent of all, the present government has, we believe, down to the present hour, formulated no plan, and come to no decision, and neither the Liberal nor the Conservative party has apparently deigned the matter worthy of agitation. Any government which should allow the discharged soldier or munition worker to fall into the clutches of charity or the Poor Law would have to be instantly driven from office by an outburst of popular indignation. What every one will look for is a situation in accordance with his capacity.

## SECURING EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL.

The Labor party insists—as no other political party has thought fit to do—that the obligation to find suitable employment in productive work for all these men and women rests upon the government for the time being. The work of re-settling the disbanded soldiers and discharged munition workers into new situations is a national obligation; and the Labor party emphatically protests against its being regarded as a matter for private charity. It strongly objects to this public duty being handed over either to committees of philanthropists or benevolent societies, or to any of the military or recruiting authorities. The policy of the Labor party in this matter is to make the utmost use of the trade unions, and, equally for the brain workers, of the various professional associations. In view of the fact that, in any trade, the best organization for placing men in situations is a national trade union having local branches throughout the kingdom, every soldier should be allowed, if he chooses, to have a duplicate of his industrial discharge notice sent, one month before the date fixed for his discharge, to the secretary of the trade union to which he belongs or wishes to belong. Apart from this use of the trade union (and a corresponding use of the professional association) the government must, of course, avail itself of some such public machinery as that of the employment exchanges; but before the existing exchanges (which will need to be greatly extended) can receive the co-operation and support of the organized Labor movement, without which their operations can never be fully successful, it is imperative that they should be drastically reformed, on the lines laid down in the Demobilization Report of the "Labor After the War" Joint Committee; and, in particular, that each exchange should be placed under the supervision and control of a joint committee of employers and trade unionists in equal numbers.

The responsibility of the government, for the time being, in the grave industrial crisis that demobilization will produce, goes, however, far beyond the eight million men and women whom the various departments will suddenly discharge from their own service. The effect of this peremptory discharge on all the other workers has also to be taken into account. To the Labor party it will seem the supreme con-

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