

The Aims of Labor.

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

THE NEW PARTY AND ITS PROGRAMME.

When the war ends the Labor Party, like every other, will be confronted with an unprecedented political situation. No comparison can be made between this situation and any that has arisen out of previous wars. The post-Napoleonic period, following the wars in which this country was involved for twenty years, provides the nearest parallel; but in every essential particular labor stands to-day, both in relation to world politics and to national affairs, on an altogether different footing from that of a century ago. The trade union movement was then strangled by laws which made the combination of workmen, even for purposes of self-protection, illegal. Democracy was rendered abortive by a scandalously restricted franchise which concentrated political power wholly in the hands of landed aristocracy. Social conditions were atrocious. The people were the prey of the profiteering classes, who waxed rich out of the sufferings and privations of the poor.

Collective Bargaining.

A generation of political effort on the part of the people brought an extension of the franchise to the commercial and the middle classes, but added nothing to the power of democracy except the right to combine in trade unions for certain limited purposes and the privilege of "collective bargaining" with the employers. Everywhere the workers were in revolt against intolerable conditions under which they were compelled to live and labor. Another generation had to pass before the workmen of the boroughs were enfranchised and a beginning could be made with the organization of political democracy on modern lines. It was said then by an ornament of the aristocratic House of Commons that the privileged classes would have to begin to educate their masters. "Their Masters," however, preferred to educate themselves. In the process they also educated the leaders of the class parties, who began reluctantly to move upon the path of social reform which carried them further away decade by decade from the secure privileged position they had once occupied.

Democratic Movement Crushed.

In world politics at the same time the democratic movement, which had received an immense impetus from the transitory triumph of revolutionary principles in France, was crushed beneath the weight of the reactionary "Holy Alliance" formed by the kings for the protection of the monarchial principle and the suppression of every liberal and humanizing idea. It is no part of my purpose to describe how the democratic movement shook off this incubus and introduced the epoch of popular government on the continent and at home. It must be enough to say that a backward glance at the history of the nineteenth century will show that the people have been steadily extending the range of their influence in politics and affairs, without any very clear notion of what they were doing or how the final stages in the conquest of political power by the organized democracy were to be surmounted. Democracy had to fight hard for every inch of ground it won. It was in the grip of mighty forces

it had not learned how to control. It fought these forces blindly, confounding some that were, if properly used, beneficent, with those that were entirely malignant. It could not see that the mechanical inventions of Watt, Hargreaves, Arkwright, Crompton, Cartwright, which revolutionized the industrial system at the beginning of last century, were only bad because they were allowed to fall into the hands of the capitalist classes. It is not surprising if, in its empirical approach to politics, democracy made some mistakes, misjudged the direction in which events were travelling and had a fumbling grasp upon the reins.

Old Party System Broken.

All this is of the past. The situation to-day is very different. Democracy is awake and aware of its own power. It sees things in a better perspective, and realizes that at home and abroad the triumph of democratic principles in politics and industry and social life is a matter simply of wise and capable leadership and resolute and united effort on the part of all sections of the organized movement. There never was a bigger opportunity for democracy to achieve its main aims than the one which now offers. It is true we should begin to think not only of the great social and economic changes that are to take effect in the coming period of reconstruction, but the method and means of securing them. The war has proved to democracy that a dictatorship, whether one head or five, is incompatible with its spirit and its ideals even in war time. It has also revealed many serious defects in the structure of society. And it has shown the need for drastic change in the composition and organization of political parties. It is generally acknowledged that the old party system has irretrievably broken down. Evidence of this is afforded by the clamant call for new parties. The appearance upon the horizon of a National Party and a Women's Party, the probability of separate groups forming in Parliament around the personality of political leaders who have lost and are losing their grip upon the more or less coherent and strongly organized parties of pre-war days, are symptoms of this disintegration. Political power is about to be redistributed, not only among the electors under the Franchise Bill, but amongst the political parties in Parliament, which will claim to represent the new political consciousness. Minor readjustments designed to adapt orthodox Liberalism or unionism to the changing psychology of the electorate, will not avail. A thorough going transformation of the machinery of the parliamentary parties and a fundamental revision of their programme are, in my judgment, not merely timely, but necessary.

Workers by Hand or Brain.

The Labor Party at any rate has proceeded upon the assumption that reconstruction is inevitable. It has formulated a scheme which is deliberately designed to give the enfranchised millions full opportunity to express their political preferences in the choice of members to represent them in the Reconstruction Parliament which will have to deal with the vast problems arising out of the war. The outline of the new party constitution is now familiar to every at-

tentive reader of the newspapers. It contemplates the creation of a national democratic party, founded upon the organized working class movement and open to every worker who labors by hand or brain. Under this scheme the Labor Party will be transformed, quickly and quietly, from a federation of societies, national and local, into a nation-wide political organization with branches in every parliamentary constituency, in which members will be enrolled both as workers and as citizens, whether they be men or women, and whether they belong to any trade union or socialist society or are unattached democrats with no acknowledged allegiance to any industrial or political movement. We are casting the net wide because we realize that real political democracy cannot be organized on the basis of class interest. Retaining the support of affiliated societies, both national and local, from which it derives its weight and its fighting funds, the Labor Party leaves them with their voting power and right of representation in its councils unimpaired; but in order that the party may more faithfully reflect constituency of opinion, it is also proposed to create in every constituency something more than existing trade councils or local labor parties. It is proposed to multiply the local organization and open them to individual men and women, both hand workers and brain workers, who accept the party constitution and agree with its aims. The individual member will have like the national societies their own representatives in the party's councils, and we confidently believe that year by year their influence will deepen and extend. The weakness of the old constitution was that it placed the centre of gravity in the national society and not in the constituency organization; it did not enable the individual voter to get into touch with the party (except in one or two isolated cases, like that of Woolwich or Barnard Castle) except through the trade union, the Socialist society or the co-operative society. The new constitution emphasizes the importance of the individual voter. It says to the man and woman who have lost or never had sympathy with the orthodox parties: "You have the opportunity not now merely of voting for labor representatives in Parliament, but of joining the party and helping to mould its policy and shape its future."

A Party of Producers.

Under the old conditions the appeal of the party was limited. It has seemed to be, though it never actually was, a class party like any other. It was regarded as the party of the manual wage-earners. Its programme was assumed, by those who have not taken the trouble to examine its whole propaganda, to reflect the views of trade unionists not as citizens with a common interest in good government, but as workers seeking remedies for a series of material grievances touching hours of labor, rate of wages, conditions of employment. This misapprehension rests upon a too narrow definition of the term "Labor." On the lips of the earlier propagandists the word was used to differentiate between those whose toil enriched the community, and those who made no productive effort of any kind but lived idly and luxuriously upon the fruits of the labors of others. It is that differentiation we design to perpetuate in the title of the party. The Labor Party is the party of the producers whose labor of hand and brain provide the

necessities of life for all, and dignity and elevate human existence. That the producers have been robbed of the major part of the fruits of their industry under the individualist system of capitalist production, is a justification of the party's claims. One of the main aims of the party is to secure for every producer his (or her) full share of those fruits, and to ensure the most equitable distribution of the nation's wealth that may be possible, on the basis of the common ownership of land and capital and the democratic control of all the activities of society.

Abolition of the System.

The practice of empirical politics, the effort to secure this or that specific reform, will not suffice; labor lays down its carefully thought-out, comprehensive plan for the reconstruction of society, which will guarantee freedom, security and equality. We propose as a first step, a series of national minima to protect the peoples' standard of life. For the workers of all grades and both sexes we demand and mean to secure proper legislative provision against unemployment, accident, and industrial disease, a reasonable amount of leisure, a minimum rate of wages. We shall insist upon a large and practicable scheme to protect the whole wage-earning class against the danger of unemployment and reduction of wages, with a consequent degradation of the standard of life, when the war ends and the forces are demobilized and the munition factories cease work. In the reorganization of industry after the war, the Labor Party will claim for the workers an increasing share in the management and control of the factories and workshops. What the workers want is freedom, a definite elevation of their status, the abolition of the system of wage-slavery which destroyed their independence and made freedom in any real sense impossible. We believe that the path to the democratic control of industry lies in the common ownership of the means of production; and we shall strenuously resist every proposal to hand back to private capitalists the great industries and services that have come under Government control during the war. This control has been extended to the importation and distribution of many necessary commodities, many of the staple foods of the people and some of the raw materials of industry. More than the great key industries and vital services have come under control; and we do not mean to loosen the popular grip upon them, but, on the contrary, to strengthen it.

No Fortunes in Private Hands.

In the field of national finance the Labor Party stands for a system of taxation regulated not by the interests of the possessing and profiteering classes, but by the claims of the professional and housekeeping classes, whose interests are identical with those of the manual workers. We believe that indirect taxation upon commodities should not fall upon any necessity of life, but should be limited to luxuries, especially and principally those which it is socially desirable to extinguish. Direct taxation, we hold upon large incomes and private fortunes, is the method by which the greater part of the necessary revenue should be raised; we advocate the retention in some appropriate form of the excess profits tax; and we shall oppose every attempt to place upon the shoulders of the producing classes, the profes-

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