

Concerning Party Outlook

BY J. HARRINGTON.

THOUGH in Canada no one seems inclined to accept the pointed invitation to discuss Party policy, Comrade McDonald makes the ante, by a few plain questions, as in the face of recent happenings he was bound to do. In throwing my little chip into the game I decline to discuss the matter from the basis laid down by him.

Whether the British Labor Government is worthy the support of the working class or not could scarcely be established by debate, nor can I imagine a more profitless discussion. When we say it is worthy, or worthless, we merely state our personal feeling concerning a political fact. And the fact, I take it, is what should interest students of Marx. The history of British politics for the past thirty years presents a phenomenal advance of the working class in that domain, particularly so since 1918, and we can very well lay aside our personal contempt for such creatures as the Hodges, the Wards, the Clynes, the Thomases, and their ilk, in view of the fact that over four million votes were cast for Labor. That is a subject for discussion, that and a representation of 192 in the British House.

The Canadian Labor Party and our attitude towards it is another matter and we are bound to meet the issue without equivocation. The plain fact is that officially we have taken a new stand on the matter. We have recognised them as a working class party and have co-operated with them in an election. We have done this before but never officially. I as the official candidate of the S. P. of C. have received the endorsement of a Labor Party Convention in open negotiation; I have spoken at their meetings and the Labor candidates have spoken at mine.

It is the fate of all human institutions, organisations and groups, to discover that, at times, their ideas of right and wrong must take second place to the facts of life, and we have on more than one occasion compromised, though never officially. When Tom Kelly ran as a Labor candidate in Cranbrook and Jack Leheny supported him, while not officially recognised they nevertheless had the private benediction of the Executive, and when Bill Davidson was nominated by a convention of Trade Unions and Party locals on the Socialist ticket it caused a few murmurs, but they were scarcely heard and soon forgotten. He received the official endorsement and the whole-hearted support of the entire membership. Generally we have sailed pretty close to our programme, but in the last election in British Columbia, we have departed far from the beaten track.

Now for some time a few complexes have been ragging my libido to a frazzle, and here is where I clean out my subconscious sewerage. The exposed plumbing had long been leaky, but "Progress," with his "back to logic" plugged the entire system and I had a sublimation almost sufficient to hoist me to the top of Mount Everest, but its generous current turned awry, by innumerable small matters requiring immediate attention; I could only mutter, like those Kautskians in Trotskyian clothing: God! I wish I were in Germany.

One thing has cursed me during recent years: In vain I called, thou canst not say I did it; like Blanco's ghost it would not down. Somehow in a life of considerable reading, much discussion and a few casual moments of reflection, I had absorbed the notion that mankind does not order his life by considered thought. He was not the thinking animal. But somehow this fact had never received the attention it merited, and for that matter does not now. A recurring question annoyed me,—why do they do it? The midsummer madness which seized Europe in 1914 started this eternal interrogation, when Marxists of long and unquestioned standing, Internationalists, anarchists, anti-patriots and what not suddenly discovered at the very moment that their life long mouthings called for a little practical usage, that they had a country worth fighting for. Then came the very thing they claimed to desire more than life itself, the thing they had dedicated

their life to achieve—a proletarian revolution—whereupon they commenced to curse and to swear, and say I never knew the man. Indeed, Russia and the general attitude of society toward Russia in 1917, and '18 is proof that mankind does not justify his conclusions by sifting the evidence, he sifts the evidence, to justify his conclusions.

To be sure, all his activity does not arise from such palpably dishonest thought processes. A bricklayer who had his own pet notions as to what constituted a plumb wall, or a blacksmith who disagreed with what experience had taught mankind is the welding "spit" of steel, would soon cease to be either the one or the other.

So in practical affairs, where the fruits of our activities are immediately apparent and have an instant and important bearing on our physical welfare, we rarely harbor for long ideas that are markedly stupid. This can not be said of conduct which affects our social being, the ultimate consequence of which will not be apparent for some time.

The Choice of a Presidential candidate by the Democrats in New York recently is exhibit No. 1. The choice of Davis was not the result of rational thought, but a compromise of expediency. It might be my singular experience, but I am forced to the conclusion that these quite evident idiots were in no marked way different to the ordinary human animal, and their deportment was quite ordinarily human and rational and follows not from their political opinions but from their God given faculties. The same creatures rooted and cheered there as will mark their ballots in November. And by the same token marked their ballots here last month. Human creatures, with senses, affections, passions, apprehensions, hopes, prejudices and capacity, I did believe, and almost yet believe that they can be moved by reason, by persuasion, by facts. But I am compelled to admit that events and conditions is the logic, and time and experience the eloquence of our case.

Thus there are for me two epochs, before the war—and now. The ten years have convinced me that what we considered good tactics up to 1920 are no longer desirable; principal of which might be considered antagonism to any labor groups. In 1920 I ran as a Socialist candidate in antagonism to a Labor ticket. At that time I spoke night after night to audiences of not more than twenty, half of whom were party members. Last month, in conjunction with a Labor ticket, I spoke to audiences of many hundreds. Nor was that all, in 1920 I tried to explain to my acquaintances who were outside the socialist movement why I could not co-operate with the Labor Party; I might have been more profitably employed reading the original manuscript of Plato's Republic. I could not, lacking the bare essentials, understand it; they could not understand me for the same reason. I will go even farther than that; members who had joined the Party since the war were equally dense. And I can go even further still: had a vote at any time been taken on the question of mutual support by and with Labor groups it would have carried.

Well then, for various reasons since 1922 interest in Socialism and revolution has fallen off, the Clarion and standard Marxian literature, as also the propaganda meetings have suffered accordingly, and Party membership is at a standstill. I see everywhere; men who have a fair understanding of Marx, some might say they professed to it, but that is merely begging the question, and who were active and consistent supporters of the Party, now working in the Labor Party; I knew them then to be trustworthy and reliable in working class affairs; and their departure to a less rigid field of propaganda is not sufficient evidence to me of runaway. However, since 1914 we have had a world war, a proletarian revolution successfully sustained against the onslaught of the whole world, several abortive revolutions, a number of master class dictatorships

naked and unashamed, a Labor Government in Britain, a complete collapse of several national currencies, a near collapse of international exchange, a progressive movement in the ultra conservative sections of the United States, along with many other things not even dreamed of in our philosophy of 1914 being probable within half a century, and if conditions and events are the moving factors in human affairs, we should avoid the tendency toward being a practical answer to the age old query regarding an immovable object and an irresistible force.

Sure enough, we have compromised with the Canadian Labor Party; we put up one man, permitting them to fill the slate with five Labor men, and so far an invitation to discuss the question has gone a-begging. No such invitation would have been required half a dozen years ago, proving that no doctrine can withstand the logic of events, the eloquence of time. The Party membership has quietly accepted the fact, that while a few thousand in a select group of workers may invariably be right, and can always state their aims and objects clearly, four million workers, moving with a working class bias, however incoherent their aims or muddled their leaders, can never be wrong. Quantity makes quality here, and wrong become right, an alchemy which can not happen in formal logic but which is quite apparent to Marxian thought.

To a Marxian, Socrates is not always Socrates and he may be a man one day and a moon the next. Some of the British Labor Government heads, all the Party Parliamentary group in fact, may be no more worthy working-class support than I am, but I do not consider that worth a presentable factor. I have definitely conceived and added to my creed the firm conviction that the individual and his character is nothing, the Party and its program a mere indication, the class and its aspirations the only thing that matters, and the indications in the last British election is sufficiently revolutionary to call for investigation, if not for admiration.

This is as far as I would wish to go. While convinced that the vast majority of our class, or of humanity to be exact, never devote sufficient thought to social problems to ever base their political conduct on scientific lines, I am just as confident that they are influenced by habitual practices, and if they can be interested, will more readily accept a common-sense view that is strange to them than a foolish one that is familiar. But to attain that discriminating faculty a certain grounding in Social subjects is required.

This brings me to a closer affiliation with the Labor Party, and so far as it stands today I consider it impossible. It would call for our acceptance of a platform more impractical and visionary than the most impossible of impossibilities and would handicap our educational work, and perhaps engender more strife than ever. It would be quite possible to work with them, each doing the work it found to hand, possibly later, when the movement had developed and had a permanent standing, but certainly not under present conditions. In the matter of reforms there is no change. There are still a few, as there has always been, who think that reforms are not only useless but harmless, but the Party as a whole, so far as I can judge, still holds to the position that reforms can only be granted and enforced by a permanent majority. And it is some satisfaction to hear Labor men after a year or two in office explain to their supporters their reasons for failing to do something for them. But for various reasons reforms have been granted and enforced, and members of the S. P. of C. were at least saddled with the responsibility of sponsoring them in the House.

While we could not as a party pretend to be Marxian and seek the support of our class on any other than the class struggle issue, neither do I think that the class struggle involves a direct attack

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