

The British Labor Programme

Anything but a treatise on Political Economy -- it is a manifesto of the rights of humanity, and thus it possesses a moral fervor which marks it off at once from many similar programmes.

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

One of the leading men in England said recently that there was more political knowledge and ability to be found in the Labor Party than in either of the great political parties or in the existing Cabinet. One can credit this statement when he reads the reconstruction programme which the Labor Party has recently issued. It is to be remembered that labor in Britain now represents a union between the workers by hand and by brain. It is from the practical common sense of the manual worker and the intellectual equipment of the brain worker, now in co-operation that this programme has come.

We Canadians must remember that it springs out of conditions which exist in Britain, and which are very unlike those in Canada. For instance, the proposals regarding the liquor traffic, while radical and even revolutionary in Britain are tame and partial compared with our methods of handling the question in Canada. It is demanded that the element of private profit be eliminated, and that local option shall be permitted as to the granting or forbidding of licenses. How far this is short of prohibition! Again, the document gives a list of the industries which are now under government control. It includes the importation of wheat, wood, metals and other commodities, and the regulation of the shipping, woollen, leather, clothing, boot and shoe, milling, baking, butchering and other trades. We know that the regulation is of a thorough-going character. It amounts practically to administration. Our few rules regarding prices and profits fall as far short of the British regulation as the British handling of the consumption of alcohol does of ours.

The most eager Canadian dare not hope that such a radical programme of reconstruction will be adopted in Canada. Nor need the most conservative Canadian fear it.

Nevertheless it shows us the current of the stream upon which democratic civilizations have been launched. What Britain does to-morrow we may do a generation hence. This is a prophetic programme which we shall do well to heed. Its elements are not particularistic nor subject to the limitations of climate and geography. It is broadly human, and deals with conditions of life which are common to western civilization. It is only time, and the consequent stage of development, which distinguishes the appropriateness to Canada of its proposals from that of Britain. It may not indeed be a fitting document for discussion in our parliaments, but it assuredly is fitting for our colleges, and for our students of statesmanship everywhere.

CLASS LEGISLATION.

It's tone is Catholic. It's proposals are not class-legislation. Unlike much that issues from labor on the continent of Europe, it contains no such words as proletariat, class-consciousness, bourgeois. Undoubtedly those whose ease and wealth are threatened will assert that it is class-legislation of the most pernicious sort. But the general sense of mankind will not agree with them. In a country where one-tenth of the population owns nine-tenths of the wealth, and where ninety per cent. of those who die leave no estate, it is too much to claim that the distribution of wealth is fair.

Indeed, this Labor Programme comes at the question of the division of wealth from quite another angle. It insists on the rights of human life as paramount. It does not argue the vexed problems of rent, wages of superintendence, and profit. While it is ready, on occasion, to appeal to the economists, it is anything but a treatise on political economy. It is a manifesto of the rights of humanity. And thus it possesses a moral fervor, even a religious passion, which marks it off at once from many similar programmes. It does not balance reasons. It appeals to no precedents. It asserts rather than argues. It is a proclamation of the essential sanctity of human life, and a claim as to the necessary first steps towards acknowledging that sanctity.

Of course, it is possible to allow that the procla-

mation is just, and yet deny the necessity or wisdom of the programme outlined. One may agree that the laws of Britain should place life above property, and yet disagree with "the four pillars of the house," which labor proposes to erect as the national habitation. Leaving the separate examination of these four pillars to another time we may notice the governmental principle which is common to them all. It is democratic control. That is government, not so much of the people or for the people, but by the people. It is the committing of the destinies of the British people into their own hands.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

Lord Morley, a few years since, wrote pathetically upon the disappointments of British radicals in regard to this very matter. He told of the high anticipations which men like himself had indulged at the time when the franchise was broadened to include the male workers of Britain. "Now we shall see," they had said. "No longer shall the landlord and the manufacturer hold the reins of political power. Now the workers are masters of the situation. Now we shall see them enter into freedom and prosperity." But they saw no such thing. They saw no labor government established. They saw rather the Liberal government, which had been more sympathetic towards labor, defeated by the very voters they had made, and the Conservatives given a long lease of power.

The explanation generally given for this disastrous consequence of the Reform Bills is that they afforded such a small amount of democratization that they proved ineffective. Political emancipation was something, indeed, but it needed economic emancipation to round it out, and deliver the mass of Britishers from their troubles. The part of a man's life which is influenced by the state is small, while the part which is ruled by his employment is very large. If he continues underpaid, badly-housed, and ill-educated, with all the doors of larger experi-

ence closed in his face, he does not know enough to use his vote properly. Well, the British Labor Programme is a demand for economic liberation! And it claims, as a thing which cannot be disputed, that it must come by means of democratic control. The point at issue is absolutism against co-operations. So the four "pillars of the house" are so many ways of gaining and using this co-operation in the national work and wealth.

One is reminded of the days of Chartism. For ten years the laboring classes continued in a state of ferment, demanding the "five points" of their Peoples' Charter as their rights. All but themselves were persuaded that to grant these outrageous demands would be the death of British trade and British power. Every political party turned a deaf ear to their petition. But what were these five points? Universal suffrage, vote by ballot, annual Parliaments, abolition of a property qualification for members of Parliament, and payment of members. All these save one have been granted since then, without causing disaster or even serious change to the fortunes of British trade or power.

Now comes this new bill of rights in the hands of labor. It will be opposed, without doubt. But there is nothing of the alarm and dread which the Charter caused in 1838. There is now a firm alliance between the manual workers and many of the most capable thinkers and leaders in the nation. The chance of the programme which is put forward to-day would seem to be immensely greater for its being put into operation than the chance the Charter had.

It is woven of the same material. It is kindled by the same enthusiasm. It is a demand for justice. The men of Britain eighty years ago claimed a share of the political power of the nation. To-day they are claiming a fair share in the wealth of the nation. Both these claims are logical corollaries of the doctrine of the essential sacredness of man. A man is of such preciousness that he must not be treated as a thing. Being what he is he has the right to live, to be free, to order his own goings, and to share at least up to the point of wholesome living in the common wealth.

It is this last—the participation of everyone, good or bad, useful or useless, rich or poor,—in the vital necessities of decent living which is the first pillar of the house. I may write on that in another article.

Timber Trade in Germany During the War

(SVENSK TRAVARN TIDNING, in Timber Trades Journal.)

Before the war Germany's annual import of sawn goods was as follows: About 150,000 standards from Russia, 160,000 standards from Sweden, 120,000 standards from Finland, 10,000 standards from Norway, 100,000 standards from Austria-Hungary, and 20,000 standards from Roumania—a total of 560,000 standards. (One standard of squared timber is equivalent to about 1,650 board feet of boards to 1,980 board feet.)

The production of sawn goods in Germany itself was reckoned to be about 1,000,000 standards of wood, sawn from native German trees or from logs imported from Russia and Austria. During the war, however, the German forests have been spared far more than is generally known in Sweden, and reliable statistics show that not more than 70 or 80 per cent. of the normal cutting has been proceeded with since the war commenced. On the other hand, however, considerable quantities of wood have been taken into Germany's eastern provinces from Poland and Lithuania. New roads and railways have sprung up and all around these in the thick forests of these districts new sawmills have been built, with great power production. The wood sawn at these mills, and also the stocks at Libau and Windau, have been supplied to the German wood industries at very advantageous prices. In Germany itself the cost of wood production is now very high, corresponding to about the level of imported Swedish stocks.

WAR-TIME IMPORTS FROM SWEDEN—PROSPECTS OF TRADE WITH FINLAND.

The German imports from Sweden during the war have been as follows: 1914, 90,000 standards; 1915, 45,000 standards; 1916, 25,000 standards; 1917, 55,000

standards. It is stated that the quantity for which the German Government has promised import licenses in 1918 amounts to 130,000 to 150,000 standards, and there is a possibility of this quantity being increased. In the event of an early general peace Germany will require many hundreds of thousands of standards from Sweden, as the stocks in Germany at present are low. The actual need for Scandinavian wood will probably amount to about the quantity imported before the war, but the difficulties of importing would naturally render such a large trade impracticable. Among these difficulties the tonnage question takes the first place; secondly, the question of labor and labor organization; and thirdly, the problem of State control. The German timber importers have always been very conservative regarding marks and dimensions, and for the coming season they have purchased from their favorite stocks in Sweden quite 15,000 standards on a basis of 315 kroner from Sundsvall.

During 1918 the Germans also reckon on a good import from Finland. In the settlement between Germany and Finland sawn wood will be the principal export that Finland will have to offer, and the position is thought to be so difficult to judge that it is proposed to send a commission to Finland to procure as much information as possible as to the quantities unsold of "now ready" sawn wood, as to the prospects of further production in 1918 and 1919, the labor problem in Finland, and other questions. In communications from Finnish sawmill owners it is stated that the production of wood has now become extremely costly, reaching as high a figure as 500 Finnish marks per standard on an average for all dimensions.

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