

The Aims of Labor.

(By Right Hon. Arthur Henderson,

CHAPTER VII.

REVOLUTION OR COMPROMISE?

Revolution is a word of evil omen. It calls up a vision of barricades in the streets and blood in the gutters. No responsible person, however determined he or she may be to effect a complete transformation of society, can contemplate such a possibility without horror. It is impossible to say what the future holds, but many of us believe that mankind is so weary of violence and bloodshed that if the coming social revolution necessarily involved armed insurrection it would find no general sanction. To the British people in particular the prospect of a period of convulsive effort of this character is wholly without appeal. Revolution in this sense is alien to the British character. Only in the last resort and as a final desperate expedient have the people of this country consented to employ force to attain their ends. There have been times, of course, when the active opposition or dead inertia of the ruling classes have not been overcome until the people have shown that they were bent on obtaining their ends even at the cost of bloodshed. These occasions have not been numerous. They have been more in the nature of spontaneous popular uprisings than of deliberately planned insurrections. The British people have no aptitude for conspiracy. They are capable of vigorous action, of persistent and steady agitation year in and year out, of stubborn and resolute pressure against which nothing can stand; they have their moods of anger which may find expression in sporadic revolts; but they do not organise revolutions or plot the seizure of power by a sudden *coup d'etat*. The growth of political democracy among us has been marked by few violent crises. Successive extensions of the franchise have been won mainly by agitations of a peaceful kind, accompanied in only a few cases by rioting, and organised revolution in the continental sense, for political or social ends, has been exceedingly rare in our history.

It would be idle, however, to deny that the temper of democracy after the war will not be so placable as it has hitherto been. Whether we like it or fear it, we have to recognise that in the course of the last three and a half years people have become habituated to thoughts of violence. They have seen force employed on an unprecedented scale as an instrument of policy. Unless we are very careful these ideas will rule the thoughts of masses of the people in the post-war period of reconstruction. The idea that by forceful methods the organised democracy can find a short cut to the attainment of its aims will have its attractions for men of unstable temperament, impatient of the inevitable set-backs which we are bound to encounter if we work along constitutional lines. Let that idea stand unchallenged by the leaders of democracy, and we shall be faced with graver perils than any that have confronted us in past times. Never before have we had such vast numbers of the population skilled in the use of arms, disciplined, inured to danger, accustomed to act together under orders. When the

war ends this country and every other will be flooded with hardy veterans of the great campaigns. Among them will be thousands of men who have exercised authority over their fellows in actual warfare, and who will be capable of assuming leadership again if insurrectionary movements come into existence. We may be warned by a perception of these facts that if barricades are indeed likely to be erected in our streets they will be manned by men who have learned how to fight and not by ill-disciplined mobs unversed in the use of modern weapons, likely to be easily overcome by trained troops. Revolution, if revolution is indeed to be forced upon democracy, will be veritable civil war.

The prospect of social convulsions on this scale is enough to appal the stoutest heart. Yet this is the alternative that unmistakably confronts us, if we turn aside from the path of ordered social change by constitutional methods. The natural bias of organised Labour lies in the direction of smooth, orderly progress. When a deadlock is reached, as often happens in industrial disputes, the first appeal is always to the weapons of conciliation and arbitration. Negotiations usually end in a compromise; but the compromise generally represents a step forward. Labour is sometimes pictured as a blind giant, but unlike Samson it has sufficient wisdom to realise that in pulling down the pillars of the temple it may be crushed beneath the ruins along with its enemies. When the leaders of democracy speak of Revolution—thereby causing much alarm to ladies like Mrs. Humphrey Ward—they do not therefore contemplate any act of blind violence comparable to the brave stupidity of the Philistines' captive; they intend simply to warn the dominant classes that any attempt to keep democracy fettered and subordinate is foredoomed to failure. By peaceable methods, or by direct assault, society is going to be brought under democratic control. And the choice of method does not primarily rest with democracy: it lies rather with the classes who own the machinery of production and control the machinery of the State to decide whether necessary changes are to be peaceably introduced on the basis of willing co-operation, or resisted to the last ditch. Conflicts will inevitably arise between the privileged classes and the great mass of the people as to whether this or that specific reform is opportune or expedient at a given moment. All that I am concerned with for the moment is the temper in which these reforms are to be approached—whether with a disposition to agree after full and frank discussion of the interests involved and the purpose to be achieved, or in a mood of sullen resistance hardening into a stupid refusal to discuss the question of reform at all. The latter mood will be fatal to our hopes of effecting a great and beneficent reconstruction of society by political methods.

It must not be forgotten that before the war there was a visible tendency on the part of a section of the people to resent the slow working of the machinery of Parliament. The war has not entirely obliterated our memory of the feverish industrial

unrest which was such a significant feature of the situation in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war. There were many causes for it. But no one will deny that much of the trouble arose from the belief sedulously fostered by an active group of propagandists in the industrial arena that it was hopeless to expect Parliament to take any interest in the workers' grievances. Political action by the workers themselves was systematically discredited and discounted. The mass of the organised working class movement never lost faith in the Labour Party, and made full allowance for the difficulties under which their Parliamentary representatives worked. It is nevertheless true that the propaganda of "direct action" among the workers tended seriously to undermine belief in the efficacy of political methods. The opportunity of the anti-parliamentarian propagandists will recur if in the immediate future the Labour Party, by reason of its own weakness or the stubborn resistance of other parties and classes, is unable to fulfil the expectations of its followers. One good reason for beginning now to build up a strong democratic party in Parliament, with a programme of social and economic reforms carefully thought out in advance, is that such a party, having the confidence of the organised movement and conscious of its strength, will be able to prove that political methods are effective, and that Parliament can be made to legislate for the good of the people as a whole rather than for the benefit of particular classes. The Labour Party can rehabilitate Parliament in the eyes of the people who have been wearied by the unreal strife of the orthodox parties, and by the cumbrous working of the Parliamentary machine in dealing with pressing and urgent questions of reform. The Labour Party sets out to prove by actual experiment and achievement that the Democratic State of to-morrow can be established without an intervening period of violent upheaval and dislocation.

The Revolution which the Labour Party seeks to bring about in this country will not be effected by means of bombs and bayonets. It will be, however, quite as thorough-going in its results as any violent convulsion involving the use of armed force can possibly be. It means a radical change in the attitude of Parliament towards questions of social reform, a speeding up of the legislative machine, a resolute independence on the part of the Labor Party in Parliament. It means further a complete overhauling of the administrative machine. Experience has shown us that the great administrative services, swathed in red tape, hampered by tradition, conservative by instinct, saturated with class prejudice, are a more effective check upon the reforming impulse than even a Parliament dominated by aristocratic and capitalist influences. We have no use for the Circumlocution Office. We want to see the Civil Service democratised. The Diplomatic Service, in particular, is an aristocratic preserve which offers no opportunity for a career to any man unless he possesses a private income of at least £400 a year, however well qualified he may otherwise be. The abolition of such a barrier is a democratic duty. In addition, we desire to bring the Foreign Office more directly under the control of Parliament, and to give the peoples' representatives larger powers of critic-

ism in regard to foreign policy. So also with other Government Departments: we believe that their efficiency, energy, and enthusiasm for the public welfare will be greatly increased by an infusion of the spirit of democracy. Labour's aim is to establish democratic control over all the machinery of State. It can be done without a violent break with the past. Labour desires to make a swift and smooth transition to the new order, working along constitutional lines, not seeking to introduce innovations for the sake of novelty, but solely for the purpose of promoting political and social liberty and putting an end to oligarchical government and the domination of one class by another. To effect this transformation of the legislative and administrative machine it will not be necessary to spill blood.

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THE EMIGRATION INSULT — A SOLDIER'S PROTEST

It is a waste of time and effort to draw up a scheme of emigration for soldiers after the war. It is also something of an insult. There is a popular war-time song about Blighty and the emigration schemers ought to hear the soldiers sing it.

Why, in the name of reason, are we handing over the future of our defenders to men who don't understand the meaning of home? After a hero has come through hell he is to be assisted to leave the place that is his heaven. The best men are to be helped out of the country. Where are we? Is there no room in England, no opening in England, for a man who has helped to save his country from the Hun?

The thing is monstrous, and the soldiers who are not cursing the idea are laughing it to scorn. They mean to plant their feet down very firmly after the war, not in a strange land, but in the homeland they have fought for. Who questions the soldier's right to do this?

Let the officials who are mad on emigration emigrate themselves. They are ignorant of their country's possibilities, and of human nature. They cannot see the great army of waiting wives and children and sweethearts. They know nothing of those simple, wonderful tales told in the homely scrawl that raises a lump in the throat of a man "out there," and conjures up visions of a white-scrubbed dresser, and the children praying for dad at their mother's knee.

Yes, there is more in this war than beating the Hun. There is the desire to come back home. Wash out the emigration idea, you who have conceived it, or soon you will be washed out yourselves. Men have not bled for a country simply that they may be invited to leave it. Get to work on small holdings and the destruction of the slum. Make the soldier realize that his sacrifice has been worth while. Penalize the employer who seeks to prey upon a hero's pension in order to cheapen labor.

There will not be too many men in England after the war; there will be a saddening shortage. And among the few we shall be able to spare will be, not the soldiers, but the impudent inefficients who don't know what Blighty means to our fighting men, and what our fighting men mean to Blighty.

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