

British Labor's Bid for Power

(By John Alexander.)

What I wish to say here is supplementary to the informing article, the Evolution of the British Labor Movement, that appeared in the Forward of December 10th. The movement in Britain, it seems to me, is the one, next to our own, that is of most account to us, as its success would undoubtedly react most favorably on the movement in Canada. Its progress, too, takes on an added interest since the adoption into the new constitution of the British Labor Party of a definite Socialist objective. This is stated as follows: "To procure for the producers, by the hand or by brains, the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service." There are several reasons that inspire one with high hopes for the future of the British Labor Party. That veteran, Dr. G. B. Clark (by the way, a co-member with Marx of the first International), is optimistic enough to admit the possibility of a majority at the next election. The Toronto Mail & Empire makes a similar admission in a recent editorial when it says: "The powers of plutocracy in Britain may be swept away in one election."

Perhaps the most concrete indication of the tremendous growth of Socialist opinion in Britain is the increase in the membership of the I.L.P., the propaganda body in the British Labor movement. In many cases, notwithstanding the conscription into the army of many of their members, locals have enlarged their membership by 100 and even 150 per cent. Old locals have been revived and many new ones formed. In several places halls large enough to accommodate the crowds cannot be procured. Last year the Labour Leader, the organ of the I.L.P., increased its sales by 25,000. Other Socialist papers, particularly those opposed to the war, also report large increases in circulation. Evidences that the workers in Britain are awakening to a proper sense of their own importance are found again in developments in the trade union movement. It is now becoming common for unions to demand a voice in the arrangement of the industries in which they are organized, a demand the right of which has already been conceded in several capitalist quarters.

The rank and file, too, show less and less a disposition to accept the decisions of their leaders unquestionably, proof of this being found in the growing influence of the shop committees and the frequency of unauthorized strikes. A serious endeavor is also being made to amalgamate competing unions, and a strong tendency towards industrial unionism is apparent. These features of the trade union movement are all to the good, as with a more enlightened membership a higher standard of service will be demanded of their Parliamentary representatives who form the bulk of the Labor Party in Parliament. Their evolutionary spirit reveals itself in the resolutions submitted for discussion at the next Labor Party Conference. It may also be remarked here that the perfecting of their organizations prepares them for the day when they will be called upon to assume control in the interests of the whole community, and tends to instil them with the will to do so.

In connection with the entry of the co-operative societies into the political field and their inevitable adhesion to the Labor Party, it might be pointed

out that while this move has been long advocated by many of their membership, there were two incidents which, operating in the same manner as the famous Taff Vale decision on the trade unions, finally forced their hands. First, there was the taxing of the "divvy," the Government declaring that it was so different from the profits made by a capitalist corporation and therefore subject to income tax. Then there was the cold-shouldering in the case of appointees to the boards dealing with the control of foodstuffs and their prices. Despite the fact that the co-operative societies, collectively, are the largest trading concern in Britain, representation was refused them on the said boards, men connected with capitalistic interests getting the preference. It has been reported that the co-operatives may establish a daily newspaper, an almost imperative requirement should the labor forces form the next Government, and a valuable adjunct in any case.

In addition to the organizations alluded to as making up the army of the workers, the war has produced still another—the War Veterans' Association. Unlike their sister body in Canada, the returned men in Britain are wisely associating themselves with the trade unions. According to reliable reports, the men in the trenches are well nigh unanimous in declaring that "things must be different" in Britain after the war. Past experiences have taught them how best to serve their own interests—by joining forces with their oppressed fellow-workers. Only in this way can they secure a stake in the country for which they have risked their lives, limbs and health to defend.

Regarding the matter of joining hands with the radicals, the left wing of the Liberal party, I should like to observe that while the policy might be questioned, it is undeniably true that such men as Hogge, Pringle, Ponsonby and Outhwaite have put up a much more creditable fight against the attacks on the people's liberties during the war than have most of the Labor party.

To these several bodies mentioned as being on the side of labor might be added the general labor or Socialist sentiment largely created by the war. The conduct of the Coalition Government in its tender regard for the profiteers and consequent neglect of the consumers has exposed, as no amount of Socialist propaganda could, the true nature of the old parties. They have piled up against themselves a huge mass of most damning evidence. Then the way that money has been found to finance the war and the vast measures taken to carry it on have been a lesson to the dullest mind. The plea of poverty put up whenever any scheme to lighten the workers' burden was urged has been exposed as a hollow sham. The arguments of impracticability brought against proposals for state ownership and control are now seen to be but capitalist subterfuges.

Two important electoral changes are about to be made which also will materially aid the Labor party. The first is the extension of the franchise to six million women and four million men. The universal employment of women in the industries has no doubt quickened their interest in political representation. The granting of female suffrage will also allow many of its active advocates to again take up their work in the Socialist ranks and devote themselves to the education of their sex in the right use of the ballot. The enfranchised males will be chiefly

young men who are supposed to be overwhelmingly Socialistic in their views. The other change redounding to the Labor party's advantage will be the redistribution of Parliamentary seats. At present in the industrial centres, where labor always finds its strongest support, we find cases of one M.P. to 30,000 voters, and in rural districts where the squire holds sway one M.P. to 3,000 voters. In the bill about to be passed such anomalies will be largely wiped out. Taking Glasgow as a case in point, instead of seven seats it will have fifteen under the new arrangement. Here the I.L.P. alone is taking steps to find candidates for ten of these. Another beneficial reform is that the returning officers' fees, amounting to \$500 for each candidate, will in the future be paid by the Government.

Surely the prospects for the Labor party were never brighter, and there is no reason to fear that it does not fully appreciate its great opportunity to become a much greater, if not the greatest, factor in deciding under what conditions the workers of Britain shall live. According to latest reports 402 candidates will be put up. If the present total of members in the House of Commons is retained, 670, it will require a high percentage of gains to obtain a majority. Mr. Arthur Henderson has been appointed organizer-in-chief of the preparations for the election. Of course, the old capitalist party or parties can be depended on to concoct an election issue—the never-failing red herring—to divert the workers' allegiance to their own interests and party. There is, too, the possibility of the next election being a war one, brought about by a political crisis—genuine or trumped up. In such a case the workers would almost certainly be hopelessly divided, their patriotism being probably exploited on the issue of a military victory versus peace by negotiation, resulting in a new lease of power to the capitalists' party.

All that has been said on the premise that social evolution in Britain will proceed along a peaceful course. But famine (of which signs are already not wanting) may transform the naturally conservative Britisher into a revolutionary like his Russian brother. Like him, too, he would have no professional army to contend with in his strike for liberty. As in Russia, so in Britain, the Socialists would naturally take the lead, they being the one element in present-day society with the knowledge necessary to give the revolution intelligent direction.

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For them the great Socialist scholars, thinkers and publicists have written in vain. And for them the enormous changes that the war has already made in capitalist property relations mean nothing, indicate nothing, except perhaps a more intensified and longer continued slavery for the proletariat. They are not even "wise after the event."

We print in to-day's issue such a communication, showing as it does the complete confusion that exists in the minds of many Socialists concerning this matter. We ask our readers to note the extraordinary contradictions that run through it from the very beginning. First we are told that all our readers agree with us as to the significance of nationalism of railroads to the fulfilment of Socialism, and this is immediately followed by the assertion that state capitalism is "our most powerful foe." That government ownership of railroads is "no more 'socialistic' than the growth of trusts." It would, no doubt, surprise this correspondent to hear that practically all well informed Socialists do regard the growth of trusts as distinctly "socialistic." That they are certain indications of Socialism in the future

not only Socialists by many capitalists have long perceived. But we leave the letter to our readers and shall not further comment upon it.

That this outlook should still exist is certainly a reflection on the manner in which Socialist economics have been taught. It can hardly be contended that the pupils are congenitally ignorant, but for some reason—probably a fault of the teaching—the actual Socialist view of "state socialism" has not been clearly conveyed to them. Even Frederick Engels, the most clear, concise and powerful Socialist writer on this subject, appears to have largely labored in vain.

It may very possibly be that there is yet a preponderance of "utopian" ingredients in our Socialist thinking; an assumption that everything that is done to further Socialism must be consciously and deliberately done by and enlightened working class and a complete ignoring of the infinitely greater fact of the evolutionary process unconsciously initiated and carried through by the capitalist state itself, a process of which the ultimate ends, and even the indications, are hardly seen by capitalist statesmen. We have been perhaps so obsessed with the idea that we Socialists were ever and always must be the sole factor that we have never been able to actually comprehend the importance of the evolutionary process in capitalist relations, always judging the act by the immediate intentions and objects of those who inaugurate it. Therefore, because apparently the state control of railroads gives guaranteed profits to the previous owners, that is the entire application of the matter. It is a clever capitalist trick of no benefit to the workers, either immediately or in the future. It is this mode of thinking that, no doubt, gives rise to the fatuous criterion so often indulged in by Socialist agitators: "If this thing is for the benefit of the working class, I am for it; if not, I am against it." The ridiculous assumption being that everything that happens from now until the ultimate realization of Socialism must necessarily be "for the benefit"—that is, the immediate benefit—of the working class.

That this point of view is false and foolish needs no argument. Between now and the establishment of Socialism it is almost certain that most of the things that happen will not be for the immediate benefit of the working class, and especially those things—like state control of railroads—that are inaugurated by capitalist and not by working class interests. There is no primrose path to Socialism; on the contrary, it is altogether likely to be even a rockier road than that which we have already travelled, and there never was, and never will be, an intelligent Socialist who will contend that "state socialism" is or was intended to be of any immediate benefit to the workers. But that does not in the least prevent it from being an indication of and a prelude to genuine democratic collectivism.

GOV. WILL APPOINT SOLDIERS' SETTLEMENT BOARD EARLY IN NEW YEAR.

Ottawa, Dec. 21.—The government is receiving a considerable number of inquiries indicating a desire on the part of the returned soldiers to take advantage of the legislation passed last session to assist soldiers in settling agricultural production.

THE KAISER MUST BE CUT DOWN OR CUT UP

"The Kaiser must be cut down and cut up."—Vide Press. Who is it crowds the cold stores with meat? Who is it holds up our harvest of wheat? Who is it says to us, "Thou shalt not