

The Pacifist as Imperialist

Editor's Note.—Here is another article on the big developments in Great Britain. It is by J. T. Murphy, prominent Communist and trade unionist, whose enlightening writings are already familiar to a large number of our readers. There will be other articles in the near future on other phases of the developing struggle in Great Britain.

By J. T. MURPHY.

THE whole labor movement of Britain was shocked on Friday morning, Feb. 22, 1924, when it read of the labor government's action with regard to cruiser building. Even the dock strike and the rent restriction bill were overshadowed by the amazing scenes of Thursday night. The pacifist premier had become the champion of the conservative party's program of cruiser building. The first big storm within the ranks of the parliamentary labor party since taking office broke even into the debates in the House of Commons. Without discussing the matter with the labor members or even the new liaison committee between the labor party and the government, the latter declared to the house their preparedness to proceed with the building of five new cruisers immediately the tenders had been given and the House had voted on the matter.

Cabinet Divided.

When this was announced even the cabinet was divided and the government benches were sounding varying notes in the debate. W. H. Hudson, the under secretary of the chancellor of the exchequer, was prepared to second a motion against the government moved by Pringle, of the liberal party. The ranks of the labor party itself were in turmoil. "What did this mean? What the devil was MacDonald thinking about? We have preached disarmament for years and we have fought for our own distinctive policy for the treatment of unemployment. The government has thrown down the very foundations of our international policy and it has stamped upon our unemployment program. It will pay a heavy price for this surrender to the admiralty." Such were the outbursts of the labor men.

The Times was more jubilant concerning the decision. It said, "It goes far enough to establish that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his colleagues know how to appreciate the indispensable necessity of maintaining our first line of defense at an efficient standard. They have shown a real largeness of view in rising above deep rooted prejudices of many of their adherents about 'unproductive expenditure' upon armaments, and a degree of moral courage, not common in any party, in acting upon their knowledge of what the interest of the state demand against the known wishes of a large section of their supporters."

The voting was also interesting. The motion against the government revealed a swing of the pendulum. Instead of a labor government by kind permission of the liberal party it was now a labor government by gracious permission of the Tory party. The motion was defeated by 372 votes to 73. Only one of the later was a labor vote, the rest were liberals. Two labor men, Maxton and Nichols, refused to vote. Altho Hudson, had spoken against the government he voted with it after MacDonald had had conversation with him. Hudson served two years or more in jail as a conscientious objector but now MacDonald explained that he was not increasing armaments but only proposing replacements so he succumbed and voted with the government.

"Wishbone" Policy.

It was interesting indeed to see how MacDonald squared his circle. He first made his point against Pringle, the mover of the motion against the government and said "that not a keel would be laid without the consent of the House. Replacements were not increases of armaments. It was the duty of the Government to replace wastage and no foreign government could complain about that. Besides when the government came into office it found itself face to face with the fact that on March 22, 2,250 men would have to be discharged from the dock yards if no further construction was put in hand. Could we harden our hearts against building those ships and allow those men with their wives and families dependent on them to be turned into the streets?"

A conservative government wanted replacements because of the development in other countries. A Labor Government wants replacements to ease the unemployment situation. The net result appears to be the same whatever the argument used. The cruisers will be built. And replacements are always improvements and that means the effective armament value is increased. But of course we must not forget Mr. MacDonald says that all changes must be by common consent and whilst we can moralize about the wickedness of it all we must carry on in the good old way. So the pacifist does the same as the imperialist. Mr. MacDonald does as Mr. Baldwin. One sings bass, the other tenor, but they are both in the same chorus, developing the imperial forces.

Mr. Hudson put the question "Has the honorable member taken into account that when these cruisers are laid down, if they are, it will lead to the laying down of further cruisers in foreign countries, leading to a possible catastrophe which will create bigger unemployment than ever?"

Replacements The Wail.

Mr. Ammon replied on behalf of the admiralty that "these are replacements."

So the existing fleets and armaments we can take it are not a standing menace.

The whole business is one big bluff on the part of MacDonald and his colleagues and the rank and file of the Labor Party know it. MacDonald proposes to investigate the whole question of armaments and immediately he does so he will find abundant evidence to justify a continuation of the policy already indicated in his concession to the demands of the Admiralty. He will tell us that the British navy is being rapidly outdistanced by other powers exactly as his Air department has justified its building program by a comparison with the French air equipment; and exactly as the Conservative government did before him. He will tell us that naval construction in this country came practically to a standstill after the armistice; that since then Berlin has only completed such ships of the war program as were too far completed to be scrapped; that the only new vessels laid down since November, 1918 are two battleships, one cruiser-mine layer and one submarine. While dating from the end of the war the United States has built two battleships, 10 light cruisers, 73 destroyers, 27 submarines and two aircraft carriers; Japan within the same period has built or ordered for the Japanese navy 20 light cruisers, 70 destroyers and at least 50 submarines and two aircraft carriers; and France since the war has laid down or voted 9 light cruisers, 57 destroyers and 51 submarines. The Liberal press already provides this argument.

Policy of Yellow and White.

The sum and substance of the situation is, that MacDonald carries his pacifism in the same pocket as Lloyd George carried his, and uses pacifist and socialist phrases in exactly the same manner, for exactly the same ends, for nationalism and imperialism. He conceded to the pressure of the Admiralty when he appointed the old conservative Lord Chelmsford to the Admiralty, he submits to the Admiralty and its navalism when its programs are put up, and hides his concessions under the cover of alleviating unemployment and the unpreparedness of other countries to come to an agreement on disarmament. All of which of course is good liberalism, but poor pacifism, much less good working class policy. Having said A in the alphabet of imperialism he is having to say B and C very quickly.

The rank and file of the Labor Party are perceiving this and it was only strict loyalty to the party discipline that got the major portion of the votes on Thursday night. They can see that so far as the workers are concerned the same officer class is in control, the same class is in power, they are doing what even the Tories want them to do, and they are wondering where they are getting to.

It is too early to see how the storm in the Party is going to develop, there is so much that is instinctive class revolt without political clarity amongst the "left" forces that there will probably be a series of crises before a new leadership is definitely established. Wheatley was certainly the man who could have led them, but his membership of the cabinet rules him out for the present. Now there is established a Party leadership in the House as distinct from the government. On this committee are Smillies, Lansbury, Wallhead, all of whom are certainly anti-militarist and repeatedly thrown into class war situations but are so influenced by the personality of MacDonald and the idea of Party unity that they cannot be relied upon in a critical situation to throw MacDonald overboard. Maxton and Johnson are not big enough to take the lead whilst Neil MacLean has so compromised himself with MacDonald on the question of his non appearance in the cabinet that he cannot do anything. Wheatley is gaining ground considerably against MacDonald. On every question where the Labor Government is compromising itself MacDonald is held to blame. On practically every question where there is anything being gained in the way of concessions Wheatley is getting considerable of the credit. That is the most that can be said concerning the leading personalities in the parliamentary situation at the moment.

Workers Criticism Growing.

Outside the parliament amongst the workers, the voice of criticism of the Labor Government is gathering in strength every day. The tendency at first manifest even in the Communist Party to wait and see and deal gently with the innovation is rapidly vanishing. The publication of the manifesto of the Communist International on Communist policy towards the Labor Government has come as a healthy tonic to the revolutionary movement thruout the country. Its publication this week coincides with the press announcement that naval ratings be used as blacklegs in the dockers' strike, of the Labor Party storm on cruiser building, and the wrangling tactics of the new ministry of labor. This week has not been a healthy week for the Labor Government so far as the working class is concerned, but it has certainly been a great week for driving home the revolutionary message amongst the workers.