Problems Of Capitalism & Socialism

The Workers' Control Debate: From 1975 To Now

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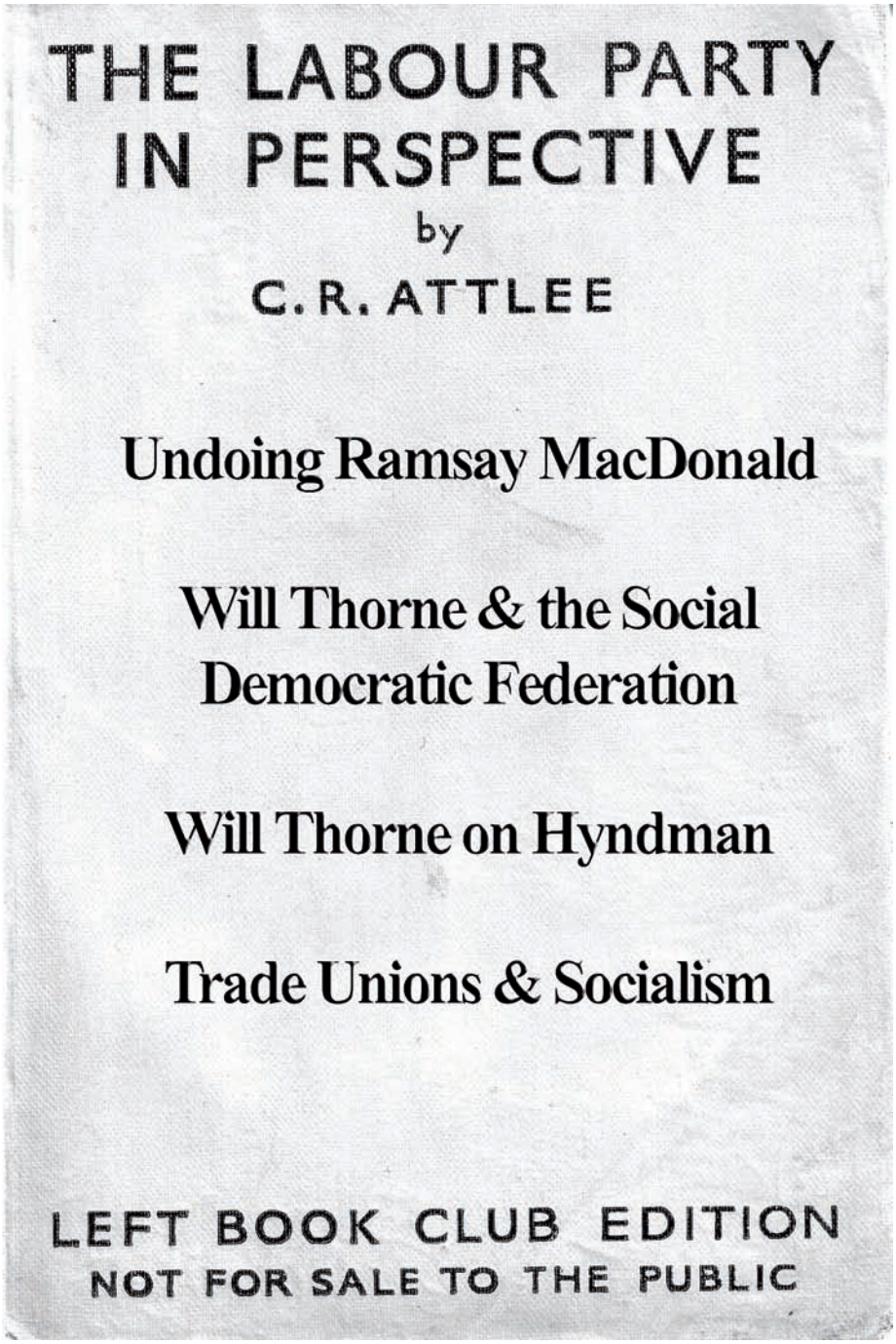

PROBLEMS OF CAPITALISM & SOCIALISM

The Debate on Workers' Control. From Discussion to Denial. From Failure to Fallout. From 1975 to Now.

Second Series, Volume One, Number Six

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...every boy and every gal
That's born into the world alive
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little Conservative!

(Gilbert & Sullivan: Iolanthe)

Labour's 1997 Conference was Tony Blair's first as Prime Minister. Just a few brief months after his landslide victory he addressed his cheering Party and told it, just as he and his colleagues in the New Labour Party had been telling it for years, that his Government was going to plunder the poor, incorporate the trade unions into "The New Labour Project" and build in England's Green and Pleasant Land a Monument to Selfishness and Greed. And they went on cheering. They couldn't get enough of him and they couldn't stop cheering.

Many of those who were cheering then are complaining now that they have been betrayed, that the Labour Party has been betrayed, and the working class has been betrayed. It seems that these people, Lefties of a purer brand than New Labour, had convinced themselves that Blair and Brown and the rest were lying down all the years since John Smith's death in order to get elected. Then in individual moments of appalling clarity they discovered that Blair and Brown and the rest had pretty much been speaking truth.

Not exactly the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That is just not possible in English politics. But amongst the waffle, the inanities, the necessary platitudes and the essential hypocrisies of a vigorous campaign New Labour had by and large promised nothing but what it went on to deliver. Blair betrayed his hangers-on by telling the truth about his and his Party's intentions!

Single issues, rhetorical flourishes and matters of detail to one side, Blair and Brown were unusually open and honest about their programme of government. Publicly they tended to be considerably more reticent about the ideological underpinnings of that programme. Which is fair enough really. Going on about ideological underpinnings is an extraordinarily eccentric, suspiciously unEnglish kind of thing to be getting up to. The kind of thing that is properly indulged in behind closed doors and afterwards kept quiet about.

At the 1997 Conference, however, Blair was carried away on a full surging tide of himself and blurted out the high constitutional politics of it all.

He said:

"Since this is a day for honesty, I'll tell you: my heroes aren't just Ernie Bevin, Nye Bevan and Attlee. They are also Keynes, Beveridge, Lloyd George. Division among radicals almost one hundred years ago resulted in a 20th century dominated by Conservatives. I want the 21st century to be the century of the radicals."

Just as openly as he proclaimed New Labour, just as forthrightly as he promoted New Unionism, so Tony Blair openly and forthrightly described the basis of the New Labour Project—to heal the great division in the historic British Left that occurred when the Labour Party allowed itself to be formed independently of the Liberal Party and thereby to reconstitute the single Progressive Movement of British politics. It is impossible to put the matter any more plainly than Blair put it to the 1997 Conference of the Labour Party. The 21st century is to be the century of the radicals. And God help the rest of us!

Blair is gone now from the New Labour Project. Its future is in Gordon Brown's hands. Or The Lord Mandleson's. Time will tell.

In the meantime it is not the future of the New Labour Project that concerns us here. That Project has a past which speaks to the definition of its aims and objectives, which sustains its methodology and which exposes its weaknesses. And even the most cursory examination of that past, which is all we have the resources to engage in here, inevitably brings us to the most obscure corner of English politics and the story of how its party system, when properly organised and discreetly operated, diverts Working Class politics into Left Wing causes in the course of all of which they are sliced and diced and served up with the class itself to the bourgeoisie for lunch. The uncovering of all of which is our project.

Whigs & Tories: More Or Less.

England's *'Revolution'*, its more or less amicable settlement of its 17th. century affairs, was quickly afterwards bathed in blood at Derry, Aughrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne and thereby rendered *'Glorious'*. After which, for more than a century, England survived and prospered, got along and thrived, on more or less.

English politics are a more or less amicable continuation of war by other means; which means are parties. Soon after 1690 the course of social conflict in England fell into a more or less steady pattern of the ups and downs of two parties, one of them more or less progressive, the other more or less reactionary.

Throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century these parties were of more or less progressive Whigs and more or less reactionary Tories (if indeed the Tories can, until Pitt energised them by splitting the Whigs, be called a party rather than a Jacobite conspiracy, or a convenient title for everything in politics that was not Whig). They had their ups and downs, within which there was much to-ing and fro-ing as fortunes changed, factions formed, European powers were balanced and the imperial drama unfolded.

Early in the 19th. century the radical journalist William Hazlitt (who sometimes at least was more or less a Whig) remarked that the two parties were like rival stage-coaches which splashed each other with mud, but went by the same road to the same place (see The Age of Reform, Sir Llewellyn Woodward, p. 58). Which is not to say that some of the mud did not sometimes stick.

Whigs and Tories together through the eighteenth century constituted an oligarchy that was more than simply the sum of its aristocratic parts. The aristocracy that generated and populated English political life in those days was no decrepit antique. All that ancient blue blood had been poured out in the Wars of the Roses and was replaced by a Gentrified ruling class that was newly out of trade and only by way of the bloodiest commerce lately put into land. Its children in the 19th. century were perfect snobs but the fathers of the Great Families knew where from and how and how recently they had risen. That made them more or less adaptable and ready to assimilate. They knew then how to stoop to conquer.

So, the Oligarchy, by way of its more or less progressive function had by the 1830s begun to absorb the industrial bourgeoisie. The agitation which preceded the Whig's 1832 Reform Act was long and occasionally bloody. Not so far as the Cotton Lords were concerned of course, but the lesser bourgeois and the workers often enough fell victim in the course of whatever radical causes their masters sponsored in the rush to self-improvement and respectability. One such was Peterloo when *"cotton folk of Lancashire in protest did combine"* against the Corn Laws and for their pains were ridden down and sabred by the local Yeomanry.

That mud stuck. The bourgeoisie later saw Peterloo as standing for its Anti Corn Law days; as a symbol of the progressive politics and the struggles of its rise. It has two memorials I know of, a great building and a song which aims to explain the building's significance to future generations. The song concludes…

John Bright and Cobden paved the way
And now where Peter's Field once lay
Free Trade Hall it stands today,
On the field of Peterloo.

(Neither Bright nor Cobden were politically active when the Lancashire and Chesire Yeomanry rode to the Hunt in 1819: mention of them just serves to underline the Free Trade point.)

Free Trade Hall was built in 1853 - 56, ten years

after the repeal of the Corn Laws and long before the bourgeoisie was comprehensively victorious in respect of Free Trade (not until 1906 and then only very briefly). Rarely, if not uniquely, for the English bourgeoisie, it explicitly marked a victory in its class war against the landed aristocracy. That mud stuck to serve as a warning.

On the more or less progressive side of things repeal of the Corn Laws was seen as just the first act in the achievement of Free Trade. It took the lesson that repeal was in fact carried through by a more or less reactionary administration under Tory Prime Minister Robert Peel; with Whig and Radical support and at the cost of splitting his own party. The most capable of the Free Trade Peelites, William Gladstone, went on in the 1860s to lead the formation of a coherent Liberal Party. Whigs and Tories then were replaced by Conservatives and Liberals, those new parties still standing for more or less the old divisions.

Liberals & Conservatives

With the stage at last set fair for a production of Iolanthe (this was first performed in 1882), with all the cast of the political nation lined up as more or less Liberal or Conservative, the contest was on as to which would capture the affections and votes of the newly (if far from completely) enfranchised working class.

A footnote in Woodward's "The Age Of Reform" (page 185) cites two instances which explain the Conservatives' reasonable expectations of their 1867 Reform Act:

"In Jan. 1853 Edward Stanley wrote to Disraeli that Malmesbury had said to him that, if the conservatives adopted a franchise reform programme, they ought not to stop at a £5 qualification; the five-pounders were democratic, but the labourers conservative; therefore 'if we must go as low as £5, he (Malmesbury) would rather go on to universal suffrage'..."

And, from an 1869 article in the Quarterly Review, which was founded sixty years before as a Tory journal in opposition to the Whigs' Edinburgh Review…

" The phantom of a Conservative democracy was a reality to many men of undoubted independence and vigour of mind. A vague idea that the poorer men are the more they are influenced by the rich: a notion that those whose vocation it was to bargain and battle with the middle class must on that account love the gentry: an impression…that the ruder class of minds would be more sensitive to traditional emotions…all these arguments…went to make up the clear conviction of the mass of the Conservative party that in a Reform Bill more radical than that of the Whigs they had discovered the secret of a sure and signal triumph'."

In the natural course of events the Liberal Party, the efficient engine of Progressive political change which had overseen the bourgeoisie's incorporation into the workings of the constitution and which was shepherding the trade union and labour movement into the body politic, had every reason to expect that the bulk of the working class would incline to it as of right.

But the 1867 Act was a product of Disraeli and the Conservative Party.

The Doctrinaire Sectarians Of The SDF

Henry Mayers Hyndman, the founder of England's first avowedly Marxist party, the Social Democratic Federation, devotes a chapter of the first volume of his hugely entertaining memoirs to Disraeli, whose career he was attracted to because of…

"...his manifest sympathy for democratic and social progress as opposed to middle-class Liberal hypocrisy and chicane…That he sympathised with the revolutionary Chartists is, I think, quite clear, and that he only gave up his adherence to their views when he saw that it was quite impossible their ideas should attain to political success in his day is, it seems to me, equally manifest…he never lost a chance of helping forward the political emancipation and social advancement of the class which he had begun by supporting" ("The Record Of An Adventurous Life" *MacMillan, 1911, page 208: the second volume is* "Further Reminiscences" *MacMillan, 1912).*

Hyndman's SDF is a significant phase in the history of British working class politics. Its significance is not that it followed on in large measure from Bronterre O'Brien's later moral force Chartism. Nor is it significant in being Marxist. It is significant in that while it was only accidently Left-Wing it was essentially Working Class.

Of the groups that came together to form the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 only the SDF approached a clear political commitment to the working class interest. The Independent Labour Party was Left-Wing and part of the Progressive Movement (which New Labour now aims to reconstitute). The Fabian Society was also Left-Wing and part of that Progressive Movement. The Trade Unions had developed to that date under the tutelage of the Left-Wing of the Liberal Party. They were more an object of the Progressive Movement's interested benevolence than part of the Movement itself. They were more a Left-Wing cause than Left-Wing in themselves: something which was very important in allowing them, in the course of the struggle against the Taff Vale and Osborne Judgements, to break away from New Liberalism and so further damage the unity of the Progressive Movement (which New Labour now aims to reconstitute).

It is important to recognise that the unity of the Progressive Movement was only damaged in 1900. It was not finally broken until the aftermath of 1931, when the worst of the Society Socialists were driven out of the Labour Party which Bevin and Citrine then finally subordinated to the political interest of the working class (Bevin had, around 1909-10, been a member of the SDF).

The essential Working Class character of the SDF consisted of at least a general willingness to break the party system of British politics.

The more or less Progressive element of that party system, the Whigs who became Liberals, had brought the bourgeoisie peacefully into the constitution, which was disrupted thereby but scarcely revolutionised. This changed the more or less reactionary element in its turn and Conservatives who had been Tories made a play for the votes of newly enfranchised workers.

Throughout his life Hyndman struggled against his background, upbringing, character and social connections. It was a struggle that he finally lost in 1916 when he was expelled from the British Socialist Party because of his support for the war and formed the National Socialist Party which he led until his death in 1921. He is widely denounced today as an imperialist and a Tory. It is generally said that, as leader of the SDF, he was dogmatic and dictatorial.

Imperialist he certainly was, and none the less a Marxist for that. But for Lenin's destruction of the Second International a Left-Wing Marxist Progressive Movement would be imperialist to this day. The charge that he was a Tory is the usual Progressive Movement abuse which has gained wide currency through a wilful misunderstanding of the SDF's attempts to free the working class from its entanglement in Bourgeois politics.

Engels thought Hyndman was a very bad influence on the development of the SDF, leading it to be doctrinaire and sectarian.

Hyndman may very well have had Conservative Party sympathies before 1881. He certainly was no Democrat before then, when he was arguing for parliamentary representation for the colonies and an extended but still restricted suffrage, but I am not aware of any evidence that he was ever a member of it. In 1880 he stood unsuccessfully for Parliament as an Independent. Though he was to all intents and purposes the candidate of the Marylebone Democratic Workingmens' Club Gladstone threw the Tory word at him. In his autobiography he says that when he set out to found the (Socialist but not yet Marxist) Democratic Federation…

> *"What I hoped to see was an England that, having reorganised herself at home and abandoned mere dominant imperialism abroad, was able to come to the front, with its free federated communities, as the champion of national freedom, democracy and Socialism, in Europe and all over the world" (Vol. 1 page 228).*

In 1883 the Democratic Federation became openly Marxist with a programme advocating social ownership of the means of production and changed its name to the Social-Democratic Federation. And it was doctrinaire and it was sectarian. And Engels disapproved of it, though I can't think why he should have.

Generally speaking, a doctrinaire attitude to poltiics is inimical to inner party democracy, to lively debate and useful argument. Since the Reports of SDF Conferences are full of inner party democracy (expulsions and resignations galore), lively debate and useful argument (not to mention frequent deadlocks and changes of mind) that party was not doctrinaire in respect of its internal relations. It certainly was doctrinaire in respect of the political mayhem that

surrounded it. Doctrinal orthodoxy was the face of its very necessary sectarianism in repect of the Progressive Movement from which it consistently and very properly sought to distinguish itself. It was a question of being doctrinaire and sectarian or becoming the (in)Dependent Labour Party.

Engels should have understood that. He appeared to have understood it when writing to Sorge on November 29, 1886…

"The first great step in a country which enters the movement for the first time is to constitute the workers as an independent Labour Party, no matter in what way, so long as it is a distinct Labour Party…The masses need both time and opportunity to develop, and this opportunity they will obtain only on having a movement of their own—no matter in what form as long as it is their own movement—in which they will be driven forward by their own mistakes, and acquire wisdom by their failures."

Or did he imagine that an independent Labour Party, a distinct movement of the workers' own, could happen naturally and all at once, without sectarian struggle and the most dogged doctrinaire persistence?

Whatever about that, in 1893, in the course of an interview with the Daily Chronicle about the strong performance of the Social Democrats in German elections Engels said

"…Our programme is very nearly identical with that of the Social-Democratic Federation in England, although our policy is very different…We are opposed to all the existing political parties, and we are going to fight them all. The English Social-Democratic Federation is, and acts, only like a small sect. It is an exclusive body. It has not understood how to take the lead of the working-class movement generally, and to direct it towards socialism. It has turned Marxism into an orthodoxy. Thus it insisted upon John Burns unfurling the red flag at the dock strike, where such an act would have ruined the whole movement, and, instead of gaining over the dockers, would have driven them back into the arms of the capitalists…"

Which is only to say that the SDF attempted to show that its former member, the extremely influential John Burns (who recently had been notorious for provocative stunts involving red flags), was an opportunist with a Liberal political agenda. The SDF did not insist on another of its former (and future) members who was leading the Dock Strike, Tom Mann, doing anything of the sort, as there was no similar point to be made.

Class Politics In England

The SDF was never an electoral force in the land. Throughout its history it ran from pillar to post in an internal debate as to how it should, where it had no candidates standing, advise the working class to vote in parliamentary elections. From the outset this was considered under the heading of no half measures, when the SDF straightaway took money from the Conservative Party to stand two candidates in London in the General Election of November 1885. This was the ***"Tory Gold"*** scandal. And this is precisely everything Tom Mann has to say about it in his Memoirs (Labour Publishing Company, 1923):

"The candidates were John Williams, for Hampstead, and John Fielding, for Kennington. The Socialist vote was insignificant, but the discussions that took place over this on the executive of the S.D.F. were the hottest I had ever up to this time listened to. The controversy brought out the respective qualities of the disputants, and the question of what constituted good and bad tactics was exhaustively thrashed out" (page 56).

Mann left the SDF a year or so later because of its negative attitude to trade unionism. He was not at all horrified by the SDF taking money from the Conservatives to assist its fight against the more immediate and more dangerous Liberal enemy. 1885 was just the first, of itself quite trivial, occasion on which the SDF asserted its increasingly clear view that while the Conservative Party held no attraction for advanced sections of the working class the Liberal Party posed an overwhelming threat to the development of independent working class politics. Whether or not he was ever a member of the Conservative Party Hyndman's social familiarity with its personnel must have served to ease the sting of lingering Progressive Movement inhibitions. Not that these ever went entirely away. It has to be taken that those inhibitions were overall more powerful than Hyndman's supposed dictatorship.

The SDF did not stand any candidates in the next General Election of July 1886. In 1892, when it again

put up only two candidates a number of its branches agitated for abstention. At the next General Election in 1895 the SDF executive issued a general statement in favour of abstention.

It must be stressed that, where a working class party is seeking to assert its independence of two bourgeois parties, advocating an abstentionist policy is weak and demoralising. Opting out in this way is really not an option at all. It amounts to class collaboration with both of the opposing factions of the bourgeoisie. So the most astute tendency in the SDF made the correct calculation that the Liberal Party, precisely because of its progressive wing which folded neatly into the gradualist wing of the ILP/LRC/Labour Party and its history of bringing the fledgling politics of the working class benevolently along under its interested guidance, was by far the greatest threat to the political independence of the working class. The only reasonable course for it to adopt in the circumstance of its own electoral weakness was to do everything it could to do down Liberalism.

It came closer to that position at its 1898 Conference when a motion was proposed that the socialist vote should be cast for the Conservative Party, but inhibition saw to it that the motion was amended into milk and water. In 1899 a motion that *"the organised vote of the Social-Democratic Party in Great Britain should be directed solidly to the extinction of Liberal candidates by the votes being cast steadily on the Tory side up to and through the General Election"* was actually passed, but, after a pause for lunch and reflection, it was suspended until members who had the franchise were polled. In 1900 the policy was abandoned and in 1901 an attempt to reinstate it was defeated.

It was not until the run-up to the General Election of December 1910 that the executive of the Social Democratic Party (the SDF had changed its name in 1907) finally took the plunge and recommended voting for the Conservatives. The Conference of 1911 (the year in which the SDF dissolved into the British Socialist Party) then endorsed the policy.

I suspect at this point readers may well be reflecting that the doctrinaire sectarianism of the SDF which allowed it to consider and even do what for the *"Left"* was utterly unthinkable did not get it very far and did not serve the working class very well. They may well be thinking that the ILP/LRC/Labour Party at least generated a sizeable parliamentary party which by 1931 had formed two governments. But that is only to say that by 1931 the working class had lost its political independence and had gained…What had it gained to compensate it for the loss of its ability to act for itself?

At the end of that long day it was the spirit of the SDF surviving in Bevin, who had been a member of it, and Citrine that rescued the working class from the (in)Dependent Labour Party's *"success"*.

Dependent Labour Representation

In the precise circumstances of the turn of the 19th to the 20th century in England there were two fundamental conditions either of which might well have ensured the independence of a Labour Party. First, that it make a point of being represented in Parliament by members of the working class. Second, that its programme be determinedly Socialist. Both would have settled the Party's class character once and for all. Either would have set it on the right lines at least. But the Labour Representation Committee which held its founding conference in February 1900 would have none at all of any of that working class socialist nonsense.

As mentioned in the last issue of this magazine a resolution which would have committed the LRC to fielding working class candidates was amended into its contrary (by George Barnes and John Burns of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers; Burns, the former SDF agitator and future Liberal Cabinet Minister, Barnes was later a member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet and was expelled from the Labour Party for refusing to leave it when the war ended).

In his second volume of autobiography (Further Reminiscences, MacMillan & Co., 1912) Hyndman gives this account of the failure of an SDF resolution that would have committed the LRC to Socialism…

> *"I am very strongly of opinion that had the Social-Democrats and Socialists present succeeded in what they were striving for, such success would have accelerated the course of events in this country by several years. The definite acceptance of clear - cut scientific class war Socialism by a majority of a conference of this character could not have failed to produce a highly educative effect upon the workers all through the country. Socialism, not mere trimming Labourism, would then have been the rallying cry*

of the coming political and Parliamentary party.

"But it was not to be. When this conference was held our steady propaganda of revolutionary Socialism had been going on for more than nineteen years, and so far as we were concerned there was nothing wanting in the declaration of principles. Compromise found no favour in our ranks. As it was essentially a Labour Conference the two delegates of the S.D.F. were both of them Labourers and Trade Unionists. They were James Macdonald, the tailor, and H. Quelch. The others were not so punctilious on this head. Of course, the overwhelming majority of the 130 delegates present were Trade Unionists first, and Socialists, if they were Socialists, afterwards. The late W. C. Steadman of the Barge Builders, better known as the "Karnty Karncil" from his strange pronunciation of the words London County Council, of which body he was a member, who afterwards became a Radical M.P. for one of the metropolitan divisions, was elected chairman. I knew Steadman well, and, though a Radical and voting regularly with the Liberal Party, I believe he was a thoroughly honest man…

"…the fact that Socialism should have been the issue at all at such a gathering showed that our labour had not all been in vain. There were more than 500,000 Trade Unionists legitimately represented by direct vote of their members. The balance over and above the 500,000 was composed of 13,000 Independent Labour men, and 9000 Social - Democrats. The whole Conference had been convened by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress. Obviously, therefore, though the impetus came from the Socialists, the Trade Unionists, merely as Trade Unionists, could, if they thought proper, carry matters their own way.

"Everything turned upon the resolution proposed by the Social-Democratic Federation. This ran as follows :

" 'The Representatives of the working-class movement in the House of Commons shall form there a distinct party based upon the recognition of the class war and having for its ultimate object the socialisation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. The party shall formulate its own policy for promoting practical legislative measures in the interests of Labour, and shall be prepared to co-operate with any party that will support such measures or will assist in opposing measures of an opposite character.'

"Nothing could be more plain, straightforward, and conclusive from the Socialist point of view. As a brief statement of principles and tactics for a Parliamentary party the resolution left little to desire. The first part declared out and out that the object of the party would be the realisation of Socialism : the second proclaimed that in the practical work of everyday life in the National Assembly some latitude in regard to temporary support of other parties or sections was inevitable.

"The S.D.F. resolution was moved by James Macdonald, one of the earliest, if not indeed the first, of the Trade Unionists to join that body…

…

"He made an excellent speech as the mover, pointing out with force and eloquence that the workers had been made tools of the despoilers in their political sham-fights long enough; that now another great opportunity for asserting their claims as the only really important class in the community, without which no social existence was possible, lay before them; and that Socialism was and could be the only possible basis for a party which had in view the emancipation of the workers, the destruction of the class State, and the final abolition of wage-slavery and capitalism. All who worked in this direction were their friends, and all who went off elsewhere were their enemies.

"The resolution was seconded by Quelch…

"The main amendment…to meet this resolution was as follows :

" 'This Congress is in favour of establishing a distinct Labour group in Parliament, who should have their own whips and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which, for the time being, may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interest of labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any party opposing measures having an opposite tendency.'

"Like most amendments of this sort there was no principle in it whatever. It was drafted not to

express principle, but to catch wavering votes and to give Socialists the excuse for voting against their avowed convictions. It was fitly proposed by Keir Hardie, M.P., and seconded by Mr. Wardle, M.P., now member for Stockport. I have expressed elsewhere my admiration for Hardie's attitude when he was standing alone in the House of Commons as the champion of his class…The issue was as plain as it could be: Should the party representing Labour in the House of Commons be a Socialist Party, or should it be an intriguing, programmeless, go-as-you-please group, adding yet another purchasable faction to other purchasable factions in the House?

"Hardie solemnly proposed it should be the latter from the beginning and all through. And it was so. There were, as said, 130 delegates attending the Conference. Of these only 53 voted for Keir Hardie's amendment, and 39 against it and for James Macdonald's original resolution, a majority of no more than 14 for the trimmers. But this obviously did not constitute a majority of the whole Conference against Socialism. That would have called for 66 votes instead of 53, and in my opinion the whole matter should have been referred to the bodies represented to vote upon again." (pp. 261-267)

Those votes on those resolutions at that Conference in 1900 mark the birth of the Labour Party as a semi-detached wing of a Progressive Movement, the most vigorous and altogether dominant element of which was New Liberalism. Had it not been for the Taff Vale judgment of the House of Lords in July 1901 it is at least as likely that the LRC parliamentary intake of 1906 would have rejoined the Liberal Party to fully reconstitute the Progressive Movement as that it would have renamed itself the Labour Party.

Nonetheless the statement in our last issue that the trade union block voting introduced in 1903 was *"the end of the ILP's dream of New Liberalism"* was incorrect. The New Liberal, James Ramsay MacDonald, did not give up dreaming, conniving and scheming.

Ramsay MacDonald

Hyndman was at pains in his autobiography to make it clear that the James MacDonald who moved the SDF resolution at the 1900 Conference had nothing in common with, and indeed stood head and shoulders above, the former SDF member James Ramsay MacDonald who profited most from the socialists' defeat on that occasion. That MacDonald is one of only two people that Hyndman speaks badly of in his two volumes of autobiography (the other of course being John Burns, and now that I think of it Hyndman is less than kind to the real Tory in the ILP woodpile, Maltman Barry). This is Hyndman on MacDonald, written in 1912…

"A man who had never done a day's work as a manual labourer in his life, who was not and did not pretend to be a Trade Unionist, who had been a Scotch schoolmaster, who was then working as a Liberal journalist and was at the time, I believe, also Private Secretary to that very earnest Radical M.P., Mr. Thomas Lough, was elected unanimously as first unpaid Secretary to the newly formed political Labour Party! It seemed quite incredible that this should have occurred. I was not present myself, for, never having been a working man, I thought, perhaps foolishly, that in spite of all the long years of education and agitation I had devoted to the cause of Labour and Socialism I was scarcely entitled to be a delegate. Naturally, I was anxious to know how such an extraordinary thing had happened; for Mr. James Ramsay Macdonald, though he had been a member of the S.D.F., and was then an influential worker in the I.L.P., was not by any means generally well known or popular at this juncture among the Trade Unionists, who formed the overwhelming majority of the delegates. I was told that most of those who voted for this smart middle-class manipulator as Secretary thought they were voting for the James Macdonald who had moved the Socialist resolution…

...

"As to Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, he is not a man I care to waste much space upon. I have seen a good deal of him at various times, and when he was chosen as Secretary and became the guiding spirit in the Labour Party, I felt pretty confident as to what line he would adopt. Personal ambition has been his one motive throughout. I do not blame him so much for that. As was said of a far abler and more prominent man, we 'did not even object to his having cards up his sleeve; but we felt a little hurt when he solemnly told us they were placed there by Providence.' It has been pretty much the same thing on a lower plane with Ramsay Macdonald. At one time I hoped against hope that, circumstances tending towards Socialism,

Macdonald would turn in that direction too, as the most direct path towards success. But he saw his own interest too clearly to be misled in that way.

"So up to now, as will shortly be manifest to all, he has been acting as a dangerous enemy to Socialism; while advocating it on the platform and abroad, whenever he felt it was tactically advisable to do so without risking a direct breach with the Liberal Party. A good speaker, a fair writer, and a man of considerable dexterity, he was certainly fortunate in his wife, whose premature death all deplored. But what has contributed to give him his political position more than anything else is the fact that he alone of all the Labour M.P.'s has had the advantage of a good education, on a higher plane than that of the Trade Unionists around him. And the opportunity to use this advantage against both them and us, though the Trade Unionists even now do not see the matter in this light, was his astounding election to the Secretaryship of the non-Socialist Labour Party at its first Conference" (pp. 268-271).

How very sectarian! And doctrinaire! And true!

Class Collaboration In England

An odd circumstance of the General Election of 1906 is that in 24 of the 30 seats that the Labour Representatation Committee won there was no Liberal Party candidate standing. This was not serendipity in action. It was class collaboration in action. As soon as the founding Conference of the LRC was safely out of the way with socialists and workerists satisfactorily seen off the new secretary of the new organisation got busy with some old friends.

The General Election of 1900, the first Khaki Election, was held in September/October 1900, in the middle of the Boer War. Keir Hardie and Richard Bell were elected for the LRC. More to the point, perhaps, is the fact that the LRC fought the election with an ILP *"White List"* of Liberal seats that were not to be contested because the Liberals in occupation of them were *"anti-war"*. The *"White List"* was the work of Bourneville Chocolate's George Cadbury, who, as well as paying £300 towards the salary of Herbert Gladstone's secretary, Jesse Herbert (Herbert Gladstone, his father's son, was Liberal Party Chief Whip), gave £500 to ILP election expenses. Money doesn't just talk, sometimes it screams.

Cadbury's money screamed Lib-Lab politics in the columns of the national Daily News which he bought in 1901 to serve that propagandist purpose. In March of the following year Liberal Cadbury donated £250 to ILP chairman Philip Snowden's campaign in the Wakefield by-election. His Daily News urged Liberals to vote for Snowden.

There was a quid pro quo. At the Bury by-election in May 1902 the ILP supported the victorious Liberal candidate, George Toolmin.

Shortly after this Herbert Gladstone told a conference of 200 Liberal election agents that he intended to make a deal with Labour. As an earnest of good faith for this the Liberals stood aside at a by-election in Clitheroe in July 1902. The Labour candidate, David Shackleton, was elected unopposed.

After Clitheroe some trade unionists attempted to change the New Liberal direction of the LRC. At the TUC of September 1902 James Sexton (general secretary of the National Union of Dock Labourers and a founder member of the ILP) proposed a resolution which would have made the TUC rather than the LRC responsible for the selection of Labour candidates. Keir Hardie had the resolution *"referred back"* (well, we've all been there, haven't we, if not at the TUC then at the Labour Party Conference).

Early in 1903 public exchanges between Liberal Leader Campbell-Bannerman, Lord Tweedmouth, chairman of the Scottish Liberal Association, and Keir Hardie ended with Lord Tweedmouth declaring *"An alliance between Labour and Liberalism was greatly to be desired"* and Hardie replying with an open letter reaffirming Labour's independence and accepting the alliance.

Hardie's notions of independence could be very flexible indeed at times. On March 3, 1903, he wrote an open letter to Lloyd George suggesting that he form a new Party Of The People to oppose the Party Of Privilege. He saw the Irish Redmondites, independent radicals and the LRC co-operating in such a party. Getting no joy from Lloyd George, within a few weeks he was making the same proposal to the ubiquitous John Burns.

Meanwhile in the real world MacDonald (on Hardie's behalf) and Jesse Herbert (on Herbert Gladstone's), with George Cadbury's enthusiastic

assistence, were getting down to the nitty gritty of a secret electoral pact.

The tenor of these negotiations, which were concerned only with practical matters and did not touch at all on matters of policy, is well illustrated by a letter which Herbert Gladstone had published in the Daily News in May 1903:

"...I do not see why a candidate of character and capacity. who is ready to support all the leading proposals in which Liberals are interested, should be objected to on the ground that he calls himself a Labour, and not a Liberal candidate."

There was no discussion of policy because it was taken for granted that there could be no substantial policy differences within the Progressive Movement. The electoral pact which had been in the offing at least since the formation of the LRC was done and dusted by September 1903 (agreed between Jesse Herbert and Ramsay MacDonald at the Leicster Isolation Hospital while the TUC was in session). It was never made public. While it was long suspected its existence was not confirmed until Herbert Gladstone's papers were released some considerable time later. (Much of the information used in this section on Labour electoral politics has been taken from Frank Bealey's "Negotiations Between the Liberal Party and the Labour Representation Committee Before the General Election of 1906," The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, XXIX, 1956.)

The result of the1906 General Election was a Liberal landslide. Again, if not for the trade unions' increasing consciousness of their interest in political independence, there was every chance that the Progressive Movement would have come together as one: uniformed as ever was in Morning Coat and Cloth Cap.

Ramsay MacDonald: Moving With The Liberal Stream

Ramsay MacDonald's notion of Socialism is well expressed in this extract from his book, Socialism & Society (Independent Labour Party, 5th. edition, 1907).

"Nothing is more difficult for the foreigner investigating our political conditions than to master this most elementary characteristic of British politics. He thinks of party as the embodiment of a political dogma, and finds ours to be the temporary exponent of a method. He looks for something fixed and rigid, and finds something constantly in a state of flux and flow. He expects to find something founded on the rock of first principles, and discovers a barque floating upon currents and moving with the stream.

"This characteristic of British political life is of the greatest importance to the Socialist movement. It necessitates a special phraseology and a special political method. It means that in this country Socialism cannot create for itself a political party founded on its dogmas—it can only hope to become the spirit of a party which may not profess the Socialist creed as church folk profess that of Athanasius, but which will take the Socialist outlook and use Socialist constructive ideas as guides in practical legislation. It explains why Socialism is traceable in every kind of progressive activity, and why it is slowly and organically changing the structure of society, just as new modes of thought change the whole of a man's outlook on life, or as a change in diet modifies the digestive organs and the bodily structure" (pp. 142 - 143).

MacDonald matured politically within Liberalism and would have expected to enjoy a successful political career within the Liberal Party. The personal ambition for which Hyndman properly refused to blame him was frustrated in 1894 by the Liberal Council in the Southampton constituency which failed to adopt him as a Lib-Lab candidate. Within a couple of months he was an ILP member and ILP candidate for the Southampton constituency.

Personal ambition made him a successful politician but it could not make him a Socialist. He became Secretary of the Labour Representation Committee on its formation (the position was unpaid, but he had recently married money, so that was okay). He became leader of the Labour Party in 1911. He never became a Socialist.

Down all the years to 1931 MacDonald remained essentially what he had been in 1894, a radical member of the Progressive Movement, a Liberal of the New Liberalism.

By 1893, just as the ILP was being formed, two of the leading lights of New Liberalism, J. A. Hobson and Herbert Samuel (one of the most prominent Liberal politicians of the first half of the 20th century, he was

High Commissioner for Palestine in 1920 - 25, in 1931 he was leader of the Liberal Party) were convinced of the need for a discussion group as a focus for the disparate energies of the most vigorous individuals in an increasingly disparate Progressive Movement. They prevailed on William Clarke, one of the original Fabian essayists, and J. A. Murray MacDonald, a Liberal MP, to begin a series of meetings in the National Liberal Club. This soon moved out of the NLC and, because it met for some time in the Rainbow Tavern in Fleet Street, became the Rainbow Circle.

Ramsay MacDonald, who was a member of the National Liberal Club, was invited to join the Circle. At its first meeting in the Rainbow Tavern he was elected onto the Circle's organising committee.

In 1911 the Rainbow Circle published its first and only book, a collection of the papers read to the Circle in the preceding year on the subject of "Second Chambers In Practice". In the preface to that book they accounted for themselves.

"The kind of questions the Circle originally set itself to consider can be gathered from the following extract from the prospectus of 1894:—

'An attempt will be made so to direct and concentrate the discussions as to provide a rational and comprehensive view of political and social progress, leading up to a consistent body of political and economic doctrine which could be ultimately formulated in a programme of action, and in that form provide a rallying point for social reformers, so much needed in the present chaotic state of opinion.

*'It is proposed to deal with (i) the reasons why the old Philosophic Radicalism and the Manchester School of Economics can no longer furnish a ground of action in the political sphere; (2) the transition from this school of thought to the so-called * New Radicalism ' or Collectivist politics of to-day; (3) the basis, ethical, economic and political, of the newer politics, together with the practical applications and inferences arising therefrom in the actual problems before us at the present time."*

That is to say the Rainbow Circle set itself to develop a common programme for the more or less divided Progressive Movement. In MacDonald's description of how British party politics operated at that time in that precise circumstance it was *"a barque floating upon currents and moving with the stream"*. It was socialistic in just the way that MacDonald was. It embodied all that was best and boldest in the New Liberalism he had matured to aspire to. It was home.

Further from the 1911 Preface:

"In October 1896 the Progressive Review was started as an attempt by the Circle to formulate a system of thought to express the progressive movement of the time. In its 'Introductory,' Mr William Clarke wrote :

'The Progressive Review claims for its adherents all who realise the present urgent need for a rally of the forces of progress upon the newer and higher ground which the nineteenth century has disclosed. Faith in ideas and in the growing capacity of the common people to absorb and to apply ideas in reasonably working out the progress of the commonwealth, forms the moral foundation of democracy. It is upon this that we take our stand, and summon all well-wishers of democracy to aid in making it a reality in the world of thought and action.' "

Which just reinforces the point that the Rainbow Circle did not see party or faction (New Liberal, Fabian, ILP, even, in the strange case of Herbert Burrows, SDF) as any barrier to concerted action on behalf of the Progressive Movement.

The main source for the activities of the Rainbow Circle is the four surviving books of minutes of its meetings (the fifth was destroyed by a 2nd World War German bomb). The last meeting recorded in the surviving minutes is the 280th which was held on 8th October, 1924. Further evidence of its later history comes from papers deposited with the minute books in the British Library of Political and Economic Science. There are also some references to later Rainbow Circle activity in the Ramsay MacDonald papers. The best summary I am aware of is the Royal Historical Society edition of the minutes edited with an introduction by Michael Freeden (London, 1989).

So, cutting what could easily become a very long story short, it can be said for certain that, being Leader of the Labour Party and Prime Minister notwithstanding, MacDonald was a member of the Rainbow Circle at least until 1927. Herbert Samuel, who had been out of the country as High

Commissioner for Palestine, had, sometime after his return, resumed contact with the Circle. The MacDonald Papers show the them both in contact with the Rainbow Circle in December 1926 and January 1927. The last meeting of the Rainbow Circle, at which it was wound up, was held on October 14, 1931.

1931: Before And After The Election

So far as the working class is concerned, 1931 is a number to conjure with. Monday August 24th., 1931 is a very significant date in our history. That is the day on which Ramsay MacDonald collapsed the second Labour Government and went into a National Government coalition with the Conservatives and Liberals.

The party political background to this episode is intruiging.

MacDonald's 1929 Labour Government was in a minority position, kept in office by the votes of the Liberals, then led by David Lloyd George. The 1929 election result was: Labour, 287 seats; Conservative, 260 seats; Liberal 59 seats.

In the Summer of 1931 Lloyd George was ill and MacDonald's old Progressive Movement and Rainbow Circle colleague, Sir Herbert Samuel, was standing in as Leader. All the way through the crisis, before and during the crucial month of August, when MacDonald negotiated with the Liberal Party he negotiated with his old friend and colleague.

MacDonald's behaviour throughout August 1931 is almost impossible to understand on any other terms. He effectively lied to his cabinet in order to provoke a crisis vote (at the very least he seriously misled it, apart from Snowden who up to a point was privy to his actions if not his motives). Then, when he won, albeit by only one vote, he took the extraordinary position that winning was tantamount to losing. He went to see the King, resigned, and then agreed to form an administration with the Conservative and Liberal Parties. Even Snowden, for whom a place was reserved in the new cabinet, was astonished.

Only four cabinet ministers and two non-cabinet ministers supported MacDonald's bombshell. Only 15 Labour MPs supported his National Government. At this it was MacDonald's turn to be astonished. Bevin and Citrine saw to it that MacDonald and all his supporters were straightaway expelled from the Labour Party (on September 28th.). And again MacDonald was astonished.

MacDonald clearly had not anticipated himself and the Liberals being such a very small element in the National Government, which, after his failure to carry anything much of his party with him, was completely dominated by the Conservative Party.

In the run-up to the general election of October1931 the Liberal Party split three ways, with Samuel becoming leader of the official wing.

Though it is not susceptible to proof, I strongly suspect that MacDonald collapsed his Labour government in the expectation that he would take a majority of it with him into the National Government where it and the Liberals would coalesce into the Progressive Movement Reunited And Ready for an election that would consign the Party Of Privilege to the dustbin of wishful thinking. Where he appeared incomprehensible he was simply engaged in a sleight of hand of the high constitutional politics of it all.

As things worked themselves out in the real world MacDonald and Samuel dreaded the election which the Conservatives forced them to hold in October 1931. And rightly so for it left them in office but powerless (MacDonald remained as Prime Minister, Samuel was Home Secretary).

The Conservatives were the biggest winners with 479 seats. Between them two wings of the Liberal Party (split now between Free Trade and Protectionist but both supporting the National Government) had 74 seats. Ramsay MacDonald's National Labour Party had 20 seats.

The Labour Party, led into the election by Arthur Henderson who lost his seat, was reduced to 52 seats. Which, it has to be said, left it in the strongest position since its formation. Better, Fewer but Better.

After all, what had been in Labour that was of the Progressive Movement had just disgraced itself into silence and inactivity or had been purged entirely out of the Party. 52 MP's was a fair to middling clean slate for Bevin and Citrine to write a trade union party upon.

Labour In Transition

George Lansbury was now leader of a Labour Party in transition. Clement Attlee was his deputy.

In 1935 Attlee, who was very much to Bevin's taste (as Lansbury, another old SDF man, certainly was not) became leader. Two years later he had a book published by the Left Book Club putting The Labour Party In Perspective.

What he was putting in pespective was by 1937 a very different Labour Party and the whole point about perspective in British politics is to justify innovation by way of denying that there is anything terribly new about it. Attlee was good at that, which is one of the reasons Bevin favoured him:

"The truth about the relationship between the political and industrial sides is really very simple. There is no attempt by either side to 'boss' the other. There is a recognition of their partnership in action on behalf of the workers, and of their freedom of action in their respective spheres.

"In order to bring about the greatest amount of co-operation there has been created the National Council of Labour, on which sit representatives of the T.U.C., the Labour Party Executive, and the Parliamentary Party. The work of this body is essentially co-ordinating and not mandatory. It is not a super-authority with the right to enforce its decisions on its constituent bodies. The most it can do is to recommend. The industrial and the political sides keep each other informed of their respective activities, but there is no intrusion into one another's sphere. Where joint action is necessary, it is concerted. On occasions there are meetings of the three executives—especially recently, on grave questions of foreign policy. The resulting unity of action is not obtained by enforcing the views of one body on the others, but by evolving, through agreement, a common line of policy.

"It might be thought that as the Labour Party is composed predominantly of representatives of the Trade Unions, and as the Labour Party Conference, is representative of the Unions which control a majority of the votes, there would be no need for such consultation. It might be, and, indeed, sometimes is, thought that Trade Union opinion must be dominant throughout. This is to ignore the effect on the mind of a man of the sphere in which he is operating. Men are necessarily influenced in their attitude by the particular function which they are engaged in performing. They are not rigidly set by certain preconceptions. The same man in his capacity as a Trade Union official may take a slightly different attitude from that which he does as a member of the Party Executive or as Member of Parliament. The considerations which are in his mind are naturally different, and the conclusions at which he arrives are influenced by his association with others. If this were not so, there would be little good in consultation.

"Close co-operation between the two sides of the movement becomes ever more important as the attainment of power comes nearer. It was one of the great errors of Mr. MacDonald that he failed, when Prime Minister, to maintain the contact which was necessary with the Trade Unions. Each side must influence the other. The political side has to bear in mind that Socialism is not just State Capitalism. The taking over of an industry by the State is not an end in itself—it is a means of attaining freedom. That implies a change in the status of the worker. He is in the future to be a citizen in his industrial as well as in his political capacity. A Labour Minister must never allow himself to forget the importance of this side of the changes which Socialism is going to effect. Equally important is it for the Trade Unionist to realise that the Union will be changing from an antagonistic to a co-operative position in industry when Socialism comes" (pp. 72 - 74).

That is really very well done. Until Bevin and Citrine set about using it after the debacle of August '31 to build their New Model Party the National Council of Labour, formerly the National Joint Council, was an innocuous piece of bureaucracy. Thereafter, for the rest of the 1930's…

"In this period of disorder among the more committed Socialists and intellectuals, the General Coucnil of the T.U.C. under the leadership of Bevin and Citrine abandoned its usual role of being the sheet-anchor of the party and instead moved in to take the helm. Citrine demanded that 'the General Coucnil should be regarded as having an integral right to initiate and participate in any political matter which it deems to be of direct concern to its constituents'. For this purpose the National Joint Council, which had originally been established in 1921, was reconstituted on a new basis. Instead of the General Council, the parliamentary party, and the National Executive having equal representation on it, it was remodelled so that the General Council alone appointed half of the members. Henceforward

it was to meet at least once a month, and also was to be summoned in any emergency requiring prompt action. Although its purpose was theoretically only consultative, in fact its decisions were bound to carry great authority inside the movement, and it would have been highly embarrassing for the parliamentary party or any other body inside the party to have gone counter to it on any major issue.

"The records show that the National Council of Labour was constantly meeting in the 1930's and constantly issuing statments on policy, and Bevin himself, who served on it from 1931 to 1937, regarded these decisions as binding even upon the parliamentary leader…

...

"After this, then, there was a rough division of policy-making functions between the National Council of Labour (dominated by Bevin and Citrine) and the National Executive (dominated by politicians, but elected by the union block vote at annual conferences). The National Council determined the outlines of policy, declaring for collective security, opposition to Fascism, refusal to collaborate with the Communists in a new 'United Front', and so on. The National Executive had a powerful Policy Sub-Committee, consisting of Attlee and Cripps, who were now on the National Executive, and the other leading younger contenders for parliamentary honours, several of them still being outside Parliament: Herbert Morrison, Hugh Dalton, Arthur Greenwood. The Sub-Committee was very active in drawing up detailed legislative and administrative programmes for a Labour Government, within the general policies laid down by the Council of Labour" (Henry Pelling, A Short History of the Labour Party, MacMillan, 1968. pp. 77 - 79).

Just as Citrine was the right man for Bevin to co-operate with on the union side of the Labour Movement so Attlee was just the man to help organise the political side.

In 1919 Attlee was a reforming Mayor of Stepney. Three years later he became M.P. for the Limehouse area of Stepney. He supported the Poplar Rates Rebellion which put him on the wrong side of Herbert Morrison, which was just the way to go to get on the right side of Ernest Bevin. Within a few months of being elected to Parliament in 1922 he wrote a short pamphlet for the ILP in which he gave a remarkably clear-sighted view of the potential of trade unionism and workers' control. It is reproduced here on page 20.

Labour In Retreat

Between them, Bevin, Citrine and Attlee established the preconditions of the Labour Government of 1945 - 51 which began an explosion of working class confidence, living standards and organisational power that continued for thirty years and then took almost another thirty to wind down and be put into reverse. The context within which they worked was the essential condition of their success—1931's detailed rolling up and rout of the joint forces of the Progressive Movement.

It is no coincidence at all that the collapse of the Labour Movement that Bevin, Citrine and Attlee built up from the ruins of a Liberal-Labour project has seen the resurgence of that project. The return of New Liberalism within a Labour shell is not a mysterious thing.

The only mystery is how so much of the Labour Party watched and listened, but saw and heard nothing of what it was being shown and told. And now has the nerve to complain of *'betrayal'*; some weird generic form of betrayal that, from the outset, outlined the future course of itself in great detail.

If New Labour's New Liberal Project had been a betrayal there might be some hope of the Party being rescued by the Unions, as occurred after August 1931. But the Unions are part of New Labour's Project. The people who manage the union.plc's of today were formed in, by and for the Project. We needn't look for any Bevins or Citrines to emerge from the politics and economics graduates who run Unite and Amicus and Omnivore or whatever. There is no hope there.

Only the Left is looking to the Unions. And the Left, a shower of petty factions, is only looking to the Unions to switch their political funds to one or other petty faction that it might develop and grow into the next in an inevitable sequence of betrayals that is their only notion of working class history.

Which leaves ourselves. We are not of that Project and not of the Left that began it or the Left which is angling to succeed it. We are, indeed, just old fashioned conservatives with fond memories of the

warm human social relations that obtained within the working class before Progress exploded it into an atomised mass of compulsive borrowers and frenzied shoppers. We are conservative enough to want to see those relations restored.

We have no resources but ourselves and the hope that ourselves will be enough at least to destroy the odd illusion or two and uncover here and there the unobserved course of events. Destroying illusions and recovering lost narratives is not sufficient in itself, but its a start.

As projects go it will do to be getting on with.

WILL THORNE & THE SDF

Though Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation stressed the reformist aspect and downplayed the political potential of trade unionism the pioneers of the "new" general unionism, the founders of the Transport and General Workers' Union and the General and Municipal Workers Union, came out of its ranks. These were Ernie Bevin, Ben Tillett, Tom Mann, Will Thorne, and even, giving the devil his due as an agitator, John Burns. All of them, at one time or another, at several times, or all the way through, were members of the SDF.

What follows here is from Will Thornes autobiography, My Life's Battles (London, undated, c. 1925 pp. 55 - 59). It gives something of the flavour of sectarian dogmatism at its best:—

Our cause was growing. I was appointed secretary of the Canning Town branch of the Social Democratic Federation. I only held this position for a short time, but during my time in this position I had my first meeting with Tom Mann. He came down to speak for us at Beckton Road corner.

It was a Sunday morning. I had been asked to take the chair for Tom. It was the first time I had ever spoken on a public platform, but being an enthusiast I felt that I could talk for at least a half-hour. To my great surprise, when I had been on the rostrum only a few short minutes I was at a loss to find anything to say, and so I at once called upon Tom Mann to address the meeting on the principles of Social Democracy. Tom was a wonderful speaker; one of the most powerful and convincing men I have ever heard on a platform.

George Bernard Shaw made his first appearance amongst us in the East End at about this time. He was a member of the Fabian Society, and came down to lecture for the local branch of the S.D.F. Although the meeting had been well advertised, not more than thirty members of the general public turned up at the meeting.

I was the chairman at this meeting, and after it was over I had a long talk to Shaw. He asked me about the progress of our cause in Canning Town, and we had a very interesting conversation about the current development of Socialism. He told me that he thought it would take a long time to make our cause popular in the country.

His lecture, while very interesting, was couched in such language as to make it difficult for his meaning to be grasped by most of the audience. He spoke to us just as if he was talking to an audience of thousands of people in the Albert Hall. I remember his sharp, caustic criticisms, and the keen flashes of wit, which, however, were mostly lost on his hearers…

We were now beginning to widen the scope of our propaganda efforts the Executive Council of the Social Democratic Federation decided to run a number of meetings each Sunday morning, and the corner of Dod Street, Limehouse, was one of the spots chosen. The I.L.P. was not yet in existence, and we were the only people who were doing any real Socialist propaganda work. The police and many other people were becoming alarmed at our activity. We were making

ourselves felt, and our numbers were growing rapidly.

Amongst our speakers and workers were the late H. M. Hyndman, Jack Williams, Eleanore Marx-Aveling, Dr. Aveling, John Burns the first working man to become a Cabinet Minister in Great Britain Harry Quelch, Herbert Burrows, William Morris, and Jack Ward, now Colonel J. Ward, who was Member of Parliament for Stoke.

After the first of these series of meetings the police intervened and attempted to prevent any more meetings being held. But this intervention did not deter us; huge crowds of people turned up, and at each meeting the police would arrest the speakers. At first they were arrested and bound over, but finally, in August, 1885, Jack Williams was sentenced to a month's imprisonment. At the end of September of the same year the police gave in Scotland Yard withdrew their restrictions on our meetings. They felt that we were getting too much advertisement, not alone in London, but all over the country.

To celebrate this victory for free speech, we organised a great demonstration at the West India Dock Gates. It was held on Sunday, September 27th, 1885. Over 50,000 people were present. Dr. Aveling was one of the chief speakers. He was one of our advanced men, a forceful intellectual. I was the chairman of one of the several platforms.

We had further meetings of this character, one at the *"World's End"* Chelsea, another at Enfield, where we held our meetings on Saturday nights. It was not the police that interfered with us here, but the people who broke up our meeting. I was asked to go there one evening; I went and had a rough time. As soon as the meeting started I was knocked off the chair that was used as a platform, and generally man-handled. We stuck to these meetings and in the end were allowed to carry on without molestation.

Early in the new year great numbers of workers and their families were suffering the torture of unemployment. A big meeting was arranged to be held in Trafalgar Square on February 8th, 1886.

Exciting scenes took place at this meeting, accompanied by rioting, but this was not the end of the unemployment agitation. John Burns, H. H. Champion, H. M. Hyndman, and Jack Williams were summoned for *"seditious conspiracy"* in connection with these riots. They were tried at the Old Bailey, and acquitted, on April l0th, 1886.

A year later, on November I3th, 1887, another meeting was held at Trafalgar Square in connection with a phase of the Irish question. Scotland Yard prohibited the meeting, but that did not deter us.

The Canning Town Branch of the S.D.F. hired a twohorse brake to drive to the meeting. We proceeded from Canning Town towards Trafalgar Square, and when we arrived at Ludgate Circus, the crowds converging on the Square were beginning to cause congestion, so we decided to get out and walk, leaving the brake on the Embankment to wait for us.

Other contingents from different parts of London were swinging along, and our little crowd was in the front. When we arrived at Wellington Street, Strand, policemen were stretched four deep across the road. We were within a few yards of this cordon, when the policemen, at a command, drew their truncheons and made a charge at us. It was a ferocious onslaught. Many of our people were badly injured, and I got a nasty tap on the head. Being defenceless, we scattered in all directions, finally working our way round to Trafalgar Square. When we arrived at the Square it was packed with policemen.

The Mayor of Westminster was there, waiting to read the Riot Act should the trouble become more serious. The Ambulance Corps was standing by. We did not suffer as much as the contingent that came from the south side. They got a severe beating and many more casualties. I believe that one of their number was killed.

We returned to our brake on the Embankment, angry at what had happened.

Several of the workers at the gas works were Irishmen, and I heard much talk of Home Rule for Ireland. I attended a meeting at the St. James' Hall, and heard the great Stewart Parnell describe the deplorable conditions of the people in Ireland. He was a fiery and effective speaker and gained many supporters to his demand for Home Rule. He was supported by such able men as Joe Biggar, J. Sexton and William Harcourt.

Always on the side of the persecuted and downtrodden, I became an advocate, in my own rough way, for this cause. I addressed several meetings

at Beckton Road corner on the subject. It was a hazardous job, because the workers knew little or nothing of the question. The newspapers opposed it, a suspicion of Irishmen had been created, and it was highly dangerous to speak too much about Home Rule.

At that time I little thought that I should become a Member of Parliament for the Plaistow Division of West Ham, and be in the House of Commons when the Home Rule Bill was passed and a free Constitution granted to Ireland.

I remember a friend, Pat Murphy a stoker from the Silvertown Gas Works carrying on an animated discussion with me and attacking me for my views on Labour questions. We were talking about Socialism and Home Rule. Pat was a Nationalist, a Home Ruler and a Catholic. I was winning the argument and Pat got wild. *"Shut up, you are a materialist!"* he roared at me, at the same tune giving me a terrible slap on the jaw.

In a second there were two of us in the fight, and we banged each other about for some time. I knocked his head against a window pane and broke the glass, and he gave me a blow that knocked me against the mantelshelf and cut my eye. Then I dropped on to the fender and cut my knee. I gave in to his energetic method of advocacy, but neither of us could go to work for a day or two.

We did not spoil our friendship by this little disagreement.

WILL THORNE ON H. M. HYNDMAN

The late H. M. Hyndman was very active in these days, both as a writer and a speaker. He often spoke to the members of the Canning Town branch of the S.D.F. I was the chairman at one of the lectures that he gave on the subject of his book "England for All," and later he presented me with an autograph copy of the book. He had a happy way of stroking his long whiskers when he was talking, but this tonsorial adornment was not the only reason for him being regarded as the Father of Socialism. It was for his untiring work and the expounding and propagating socialistic and humanitarian ideas. He was always very optimistic in those days about the early consummation of the Social Revolution…

...I sometimes think that such people only come into our movement for what personal aggrandisement they can get out of it. Hyndman was not of this type or calibre. He could have died a wealthy man, but he spent a life fortune in the Socialist movement, and very few people in this country have made the same financial sacrifice as he did during the forty or more years in which he took an active part in it.

Socialism For Trade Unionists

Published Circa 1922

BY

CLEMENT ATTLEE M.P.

INTRODUCTION

The Great War has made Labour one of the deciding factors in world politics. In almost every country Labour is rapidly approaching power. Men and women are therefore naturally asking one another, "What will Labour do when it is entrusted with the Government of the country; how will it handle the problems of peace and war, trade, finance, and education?"

In a series of pamphlets, of which this is one, the Independent Labour Party attempts to give a clear and concise answer to these queries.

The I.L.P. stands for Socialism. It believes that Socialism is not merely one amongst many remedies, but the only practical remedy for the gigantic problems created by the world war. It believes that it is the bold programme and no other that can solve present-day evils.

Socialism itself—like all our thinking—has changed and developed in the light of the experience of the last few years. The I.L.P. has, therefore, revised its programme, and now offers this series of pamphlets as an interpretation of modern Socialism.

C.A.

SOCIALISM FOR TRADE UNIONISTS

DURING the last two years the industrial Labour Movement in Great Britain has sustained a series of heavy defeats. These defeats are all the more impressive from the fact that in 1919 the movement had reached its highest point in numbers and prestige. Over six million workers were in Unions.

Big advances in wages, leisure and hours had been won and the status of the worker in industry seemed on the point of being acknowledged. The Sankey Enquiry into the Mining Industry and the Shaw Enquiry into Transport had brought the Unions and their leaders prominently before the public and had exposed the inefficiency of the present methods of carrying on industry. The action of the Unions in threatening a general strike on the question of war with the Russian Republic had shown the possibilities of industrial action for political ends, while the Triple Alliance was the bogey of the middle-class readers of the capitalist Press.

To-day in every industry wages and conditions are slipping back to the pre-war standard. Not merely the newly-organised agricultural labourers and the sweated women workers have suffered, but the strongest units of the industrial army. The Miners, the Engineers and the Railwaymen have sustained heavy losses. The Trades Union Congress reports a loss of over a million members.

The position is one that should cause every worker

in the country to consider seriously. He should ask himself what are the causes of this great set-back. Is it the fault of the leaders? Is it the faulty organisation? Is it the result of economic causes bevond control? Is it, perhaps, the inevitable result of a failure to realise the necessary conditions of success, a failure to make correct use of the weapons available, a failure to realise the true objective of the movement?

Let us see if we can find an answer to these questions.

THE LESSON OF HISTORY.

It is now nearly a hundred years since Trade Unions ceased to be illegal conspiracies and were able to fight openly. During that period the movement has grown from a few scattered thousands to an organised body of over five millions. Unions count their members by the thousand instead of by tens. By various devices—the strike, collective bargaining, mutual insurance and political action—an endeavour has been made to build up a code which shall give the worker some rights against his master and to secure for him a larger share in the product of industry. Undoubtedly considerable advances have been made. Assuredly without the Unions, the plight of the worker to-day would be worse than it is.

But the fact remains that in 1922, as in 1822, the worker is still a mere wage-earner, dependent for his livelihood on the willingness of a capitalist to employ him at a profit. He has no status in industry, no security of life, no minimum standard of wage. When he ceases to be profitable he is thrown into the street to exist as he can on charity or State relief. Surely this is a poor return for a hundred years of endeavour and sacrifice.

Throughout Trade Union history there have been waves of advance and retreat. These waves have been conditioned by the state of trade. When trade was good, advances were won ; when trade was bad, these advances were largely lost. Again and again history repeats itself. Brisk trade, a rush to enter the Unions, concessions in hours, wages and conditions obtained, and then—the slump, wages reduced, hours lengthened and a falling away of the newly-organised workers.

The last of these cycles of advance and retreat is with us to-day. The war created an abnormal situation. For the first time for hundreds of years there was a shortage of labour. Unemployment disappeared and the workers were in a position to demand a high price for their commodity, labour. But the nation was at war. An appeal was made to patriotism, and as the vast majority of trade unionists, leaders and rank and file alike, were ardent supporters of the war, the workers, unlike the capitalists, held their hand. Only in the later stages of the war, when industrial unrest became widespread, and the Shop Stewards' Movement forced the pace, and in the short boom that followed the Armistice, were concessions obtained.

In the first year after the war a feeling of elation prevailed, big talk was indulged in, and an appearance of Labour strength created. But the capitalists were only biding their time. Entrenched in the Profiteers' Parliament and vastly better organised than ever before, they watched the tide of unemployment flooding, and when millions were out of work and Union funds depleted, they struck, and struck hard. The workers were out-manoeuvred and out-fought. Black Friday was but the most outstanding incident in a series of crushing defeats all along the line.

INDUSTRIAL TRENCH WARFARE.

The contest between Capital and Labour on the industrial field is very like the long-drawn-out campaign in France and Flanders during the war. Each side is entrenched. Labour attacks and, after enormous sacrifices, gains a few hundred yards of trench, an extra twopence on piece rates, a shorter working day, the "dockers' tanner" or Union recognition. Then in due course comes the counter-attack, and, except for a few small gains, the whole advantage is swept away. In this warfare Capital holds the initiative. It knows when to attack and when to retreat according to plan. It occupies the high ground and has the more powerful weapons, including the poison gas of the capitalist Press. This is the kind of warfare in which Labour has been engaged for the last hundred years. A fight for small and limited objectives gained with enormous sacrifice and lost again very soon. It is time that this form of warfare was ended.

LABOUR'S MISTAKEN OBJECTIVE.

The fault has been the failure to realise that little successes are of no permanent value. The objective must be the defeat of the enemy, the capture of his position and its consolidation. The capitalist position is the ownership of the means of production, distribution

and exchange. It is true that Labour's organisation has been faulty and its leadership often bad, but this is caused by the mistaken aim. At the present moment, at a time of crisis, we have the N.U.R. and the A.E.U. fighting each other instead of the common enemy. Many workers still trust in their position as skilled craftsmen and assert their superiority over other workers. Many are more concerned in the fortunes of their particular Unions than in the interests of the workers. The tragedy of Labour has been the sacrifices made for wholly insufficient advantages.

The same weakness has been displayed in the use of the other great weapon, the vote. For years workers were content to send their masters to Parliament, contenting themselves with extracting from them promises to support particular measures, such as Mines Regulation and Workmen's Compensation Acts. Later they did begin to send their own men, but in such small numbers that they had to beg for concessions from the capitalist parties. Those representatives then, and even now, for the most part, regarded themselves as sent to look after the interests of particular bodies of workers and were content with small gains for their sections. The Labour Party to-day is but 143 in a House of 610, and even were a majority returned at the next election, they would have no clear idea of what the workers expect them to do. The individual worker, it asked to sketch a Labour programme, would probably mention unemployment and housing, then perhaps some matter of concern to his particular industry. Some would mention nationalisation, but without any clear idea of how a nationalised industry would be carried on or what would be his position in it.

LABOUR'S REAL OBJECTIVE.

Industrial and political action are both necessary. Hitherto the workers have used, partially and uncertainly, one or other weapon. Some have endeavoured to gain industrial objects by political action, others political objects by industrial action. The two weapons must be used together. The political weapon is necessary for the capture of the power of the State, of the legislative and administrative machine and the forces of law and order. It must be used to effect a transfer of the ownership of industry from the capitalist to the community. The industrial weapon must be used to support the political power against all attempts at revolution by the capitalist class during the transition from capitalism to the co-operative commonwealth. And, above all, the workers must be so organised as to be ready to take over the control and management of industry from the capitalist.

THE CONTROL OF INDUSTRY.

Industry to-day is controlled by a small group of wealthy men, who carry it on for the purpose of making profit for themselves and for a larger body of shareholders whose sole function is to receive interests and profits. The characteristic unit in industry is the limited company controlled by the capitalist. In every industry the competition of a number of individual undertakings is being replaced by some form of trust or combine, while behind all combinations stands the great money trust of the big banks controlling credit. Labour's aim is to place the worker in control instead of the capitalist, to organise production for use instead of for profit, and to replace capitalist autocracy by industrial democracy. Instead of the worker being "a hand" depending for his livelihood on the willingness of someone to employ him at a profit, without status and subject to the absolute commands of a master, he must be a free man controlling industry in association with his fellows in the interests of all.

The task of eliminating capitalist control belongs to political democracy ; the work of organising the new industrial order belongs to industrial democracy. The Trade Union movement is the expression of industrial democracy. It must undertake and fit itself for its task.

Let us consider the kind of organisation that we desire in industry and we shall see what reforms are needed in Trade Union structure and method.

THE NEW INDUSTRIAL ORDER.

Each industry is to be considered as a piece of social machinery designed for the performance of a particular service to the community. This service must be performed in the most efficient manner possible in the interests of all. Let us take the transport industry as an example. All transport, whether by rail, road, water, or air, will form one service, the general direction of which will be in the hands of representatives of the workers in the industry in consultation with representatives of the users of the service.

Within this great body of organised transport workers will be groups engaged in the different kinds

of transport, railway, shipping, ports, etc. Every one of these groups will be self-governing. The principle of self-government will be applied from the largest to the smallest groups. Subject to their possessing the necessary qualifications, the superior grades will be chosen by their fellow workers. Discipline there will be, and must be, but it will be the self-imposed discipline of free men. Each worker will have his share of responsibility and his status in the industry. He will not be turned off without pay when his services are temporarily not required. He will be a worker enrolled in a particular service and entitled to the standard remuneration of his grade.

The internal management of the service will be in the hands of the workers : the kind of service to be provided and the amount to be charged for it must be a matter for negotiation with other organised bodies ; but in any case the industry must provide a standard of life for the workers based on the productive capacity of the community. The whole industry of the country will be regarded as a unity, and there will be no question of one section taking advantage of its economic position as against other sections.

In a similar way other services, mining, building, textile, engineering, etc., will be organised. The exact system will doubtless differ in each industry. It would be absurd to have precisely the same system for agriculture and transport. Experience will show what is best suited for each particular service, and, provided that the general principle is maintained, the workers in each industry will make their own schemes. The Miners' Federation and the Building Trades have by precept and example shown the way. It is the duty of the workers in every industry to follow their example.

THE IMMEDIATE TASK OF THE TRADE UNIONIST.

Such being the general idea of the future control of industry, we must now consider what changes are necessary in Trade Union structure and methods. While of recent years there has been a welcome tendency to substitute a few large Unions for a multitude of small organisations, the Trade Union World is still far too much divided. In particular, craft Union and industrial Union exist side by side, with consequent friction and loss of power.

The craft Union as an exclusive body has had its day. It depended for its success on a policy of exclusion based on the skill of its members. It enabled a limited number of workers to raise themselves slightly above the general level. To-day the progress of invention and mass production methods have destroyed its economic basis. The new note must be inclusiveness. Workers in a particular industry, of all grades from the most skilled technician down to the lowest skilled labourer, must be in the same Union. In particular, the management grades must be included. With the control of industry by the workers as the objective, organisation by industry becomes imperative. There must be an end to demarcation squabbles and member poaching.

The best solution is undoubtedly the one big all-embracing Union. Within this Union there will be ample room for subsidiary groupings, vertical by industry and horizontal by craft. There must be the widest autonomy for groups and branches consistent with unity of aim and action. The Headquarters of the Union must command the best brains of the movement and must have a thoroughly well-equipped staff, able to consider the industrial position in all its bearings. To the forging of this instrument, old prejudices and obsolete loyalties to societies must give way.

TRADE UNION METHOD.

While the old methods of Trade Unionism, the strike, mutual insurance, and collective bargaining, must necessarily continue for the every-day work of the Unions, they must be employed with more conscious direction. The industrial strike is in the main a defensive weapon and the last line of defence at that. Whenever a strike has been decided upon, it must be backed by the whole force of the movement, the exact objective must be laid down, its extent limited beforehand, and a careful calculation made as to the area of industry affected. The strike begun by one section and extended to others piecemeal invites defeat. Simultaneous determination of agreements would help in this connection. Broadly speaking, the strike can now only be employed on a limited field for bringing into line an individual recalcitrant employer or on a national scale. In the latter case the Government is bound to be called in, and the matter becomes political. A strike on a large scale must be considered carefully in close consultation with the political movement and must only be undertaken for an object of the highest importance affecting the great mass of the workers.

The method of collective bargaining must be used to enforce wherever possible Labour's claim to control. Industrial councils, conciliation boards, and Trade Boards should be considered not merely as useful pieces of machinery for enforcing the common rule, but as means of obtaining insight into the conditions of industry and of insisting on Labour's rights to and interests in an industry and not merely in individual businesses. Every workers' representative on a Works' Committee must in the same way consider the business in which he is employed merely as part of an industry. Much can be done by the use of the collective contract to substitute the discipline of the group for the discipline imposed by the management.

Two final points must be made. First, the necessity for international co-operation with Trade Unionists abroad. To-day is the day of world markets and world combines, and every Trade Unionist must realise that his interests are built up with those of his brothers all over the world. He cannot make a permanent advance at their expense. Secondly, the new industrial order makes a call on every individual Trade Unionist. It requires his or her conscious effort. The struggle will be severe, and the mere ticket-holder not only gives no help, but actually hinders the coming of industrial democracy.

Let every Trade Unionist realise what his duty is. His membership is not a small thing. It is the sign of his consecration to a great task, nothing less than the liberation of the human race from the industrial machine which it has created and by which it is being destroyed. The present industrial system must pass away, but only when a new order is ready to take its place. That new industrial order is now in the making and its spirit is that of the old Trade Union watchword:

"Each for all and all for each."

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