

Labour Party "Reconstruction". The Old Coat Turned

The new constitution of the Labour Party does not make that party any more of a working-class party in the real sense than it has been heretofore. As has frequently been pointed out in these columns, its policy is, for the following reasons, opposed to the best interests of the working class, and calculated to hinder their emancipation.

(1) The Labour Party is not a Socialist party, and consequently is not concerned with the abolition of capitalism and wage-slavery.

(2) The time and energy of the Labour Party are spent in advocating and pleading for reforms, which cannot materially improve conditions for the working class, but which confuse the minds of the workers, leading them to expect benefits they never obtain, thus causing disappointment, disgust, and apathy.

(3) The avowed aim of the Labour Party is to get members into Parliament, in the belief that those members can legislate in the interest of the working class, whereas they are powerless to do so because they are dependent upon a capitalist party for constituencies in which to run their candidates, and the electorate of such constituencies merely vote them in because they stand for a Liberal programme and policy.

(4) By claiming to have a Socialist objective the Labour Party perpetuate the false notion that Socialism will be established, not as the result of an organised and conscious effort of the working class, but by a series of political reforms concurred in by the capitalist class.

(5) The Labour Party deny the class struggle: the antagonism of interests between the working class and the capitalist class. Recognition of this antagonism is, quite obviously, the fundamental principle which forms the basis of a genuine working-class, or Socialist party.

The class struggle is established as an indisputable fact directly the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class is demonstrated. And the conscious organisation of the working class to free itself from exploitation is the logical outcome of its recognition that it is an exploited class. As the capitalist class will endeavour to maintain their power to exploit it is clear that the working class will be antagonistic to them in accordance with the degree of recognition of their subject position that prevails among them.

The claim of the Labour Party to be a working-class party, or a Socialist party, is, therefore, a false claim, because they neither demonstrate nor claim nor assert the exploitation of the working class. These two facts are of vital importance to a working-class organisation. They should never be lost sight of when working-class conditions are under discussion. For without a recognition of them the workers can never arrive at a correct understanding of their position, or of the principles upon which a working-class political party should be organised.

Exploitation is the condition imposed upon the working class by the capitalist class. The antagonism of classes arises from it. But in itself antagonism, or class war, is not a condition to be looked for as permanent; for the workers to shirk it is to submit to exploitation; to kick against the pricks in blind revolt is folly. They must fight the class war with their emancipation in full view as the result of their victory over the capitalist class. For that reason working-class education is not complete until the basis of an alternative system of society is made clear, and the means for its attainment understood. Thus Socialist philosophy becomes clear as daylight when the prominent and essential factors of working-class conditions are singled out and kept in view.

The working class being an exploited class must, where conscious of it, be antagonistic to the class that exploits, and when it is seen that a system of society is possible based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means of life, the workers must struggle for its attainment against those who wish to retain the present system; and they will be guided by history, experience, and common sense as to the easiest and most direct method of overcoming the resistance of the exploiting class and establishing the new order.

These principles should form the basis of a genuine working-class party. Do the Labour Party, either in its old or new constitution proclaim them as the basis of their organisation? The answer is no, the Labour Party have never adopted these principles, but from time to time, when it has suited their purpose, their prominent members have dallied with them, giving them a fleeting recognition in slipshod and unscientific fashion. But more generally they are to be found ridiculing the idea of class war and advocating State ownership, or nationalisation of industries. Thus in their new constitution they say:

The object of the party is to secure for producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible on the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

This the manifesto—if one may dignify it by that name—claims to be "distinctly, though not explicitly, Socialistic". In other words it is so framed that prominent members may put what construction they please upon it, and those workers who have but a scanty knowledge of Socialism, but who are in sympathy with it, can be easily persuaded to support the party.

Immediately following this "distinctly, though not explicitly, Socialistic" pronouncement the following paragraph appears:

An important innovation is that it is proposed that it shall be the duty of the national executive prior to every general election, to define the principle issues for that election which, in the judgement of the national executive, should be made the special party programme for that particular election campaign.

In addition to this the party Conference

decides from time to time what specific proposals of legislative, financial, or administrative reform shall receive the general support of the party.

So that whatever may be meant by their object as stated above, the party will adopt other issues at the only time when the workers would have an opportunity of giving it their unqualified approval and support. If their object were "distinctly" Socialistic it would not be known at any election, what proportion of their total vote was recorded in its favour. The object itself might be entirely lost sight of by their supporters, and their attention concentrated on the issues that made up the "special party programme for that particular election campaign". Such a method gives rise to a double confusion: the workers are confused because they do not know for what the votes are given. That in itself would not trouble them, their object being really a personal one—to get returned. Hence the introduction of issues that would appeal to the non-Socialist element—the element on which they depend for the success of their candidature.

Neither in their general propaganda nor in their election programmes do the labour leaders stand for Socialism. They take sides on every issue raised between Liberals and Tories, though such issues can have no interest for the workers beyond proving to them that those parties only discuss questions affecting their class, and settle them in accordance with the interests of their class.

Capitalist politics may, therefore, be left to capitalist politicians, to whom the Labour Party belong. The workers should adopt the Socialist Objective and support only that at all times. Other objects and issues are only raised to confuse them, to satisfy personal ambitions, or to strengthen the position of the ruling class.

Let the rank and file of the Labour Party realise that only Socialism is worth voting and working for, and their leaders will, perforce, stand for Socialism, or be stripped of their sheep's clothing and be revealed as capitalist wolves.

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