

The new "force" in politics

So! We are, it seems, to rejoice in the advent of a new force in English politics. We are to observe "the descent of a bolt out of the blue" and be happy. We are to note that "Labour" no longer sits on the "doorstep" but is inside the House of Commons and will do things. We are even to accept the fact as a sign of victory for—Socialism! Well! This *is* interesting. Because in our ignorance we thought this sort of "Labour" force descended from the blue, or, to be more accurate, ascended from the black, very many moons since. We seemed to have recollected even of a "Labour" minister in a Liberal administration before Mr Burns. It is true these old-time "Labour" representatives received the support of the Liberal Party. True also that the Rt. Hon. Thomas Burt was for very good reasons *persona grata* with Liberalism. But then so also was and is Mr Burns, the chairman of the "Labour" group in the last parliament. And is it not the indisputable fact that with few exceptions, the present "Labour" members were the unofficial candidates of the Liberal Party and were backed by most of the local Liberal associations? Then why should we rejoice?

Weighed in the balance

What if this sort of "Labour" representation *has* got inside the House of Commons in rather larger force than usual (which we suppose is what our enthusiastic exhorters mean when they have called upon us to be glad)—what then? Have they some greater power behind them by which they will be capable of performing greater deeds than their predecessors? What power? Are they not the nominees of an organisation whose members have not reached the stage of political development wherein they can dissociate their interests from the interests of the capitalist political factions? Are not these "Labour" members' wages therefore dependent upon the manner in which they approach the measures introduced by the capitalist parties? Can they freely attack these measures and the parties introducing them and be sure that their action will not be misunderstood by those who pay the piper? If so, what becomes of the argument in favour of the strict independence of the LRC candidates on the ground that if they were associated with the Liberal Party (for example) the Tory members of the LRC would break away? If not, are they not obliged to give their support to capitalist legislation (unless, of course, that legislation is so glaringly anti-Labour that even the members of the LRC could appreciate it) for fear the contrary action would be misunderstood? Are they not for the same reason forced to proceed with exceeding circumspection in their endeavours to induce the capitalist government to adopt measures they (the capitalist government) do not desire to adopt?

Found Wanting

Is it not the fact that the majority of these "Labour" representatives are themselves, in everything but name, Liberals, and, not understanding the reason for the position of the working class, cannot act as champions of working-class interests? And is it not undeniable that those who *do* profess to understand, and who at other times are prepared to call themselves Socialists, have repeatedly obscured their Socialism in order to secure the position (as when they stood for election) and confused the minds of those whose intellectual clarity they are supposed to desire, by associating themselves with the representatives of capitalism for capitalist objects? Then what can be expected from these more than their predecessors? What is the use of their separate party and separate whips? The fact is that nine out of ten of them have been elected in alliance with the Liberals; they are by education and sympathy Liberals; they are paid

by an organisation overwhelmingly Liberal, and they may be expected to act, as Crooks and Shackleton and Henderson, and in a slightly modified manner, Hardie, have all along acted Liberal. The man who expects more from them is likely to be disappointed; the man who regards their return as a victory for Socialism simply doesn't know what he is talking about.

Why the "Labour" men will not do

Our position is that these men, whatever their intentions, are actually retarding the development of the only organisation of the working class that can enter into effective conflict with the forces of capitalism, because they obscure the fact that this conflict exists *always* in industrial affairs, and do not insist that it must be waged upon the political plane also. By association with capitalist representatives in both political and economic affairs they induce the idea (which capitalism does everything possible to foster) that the hostility does not exist, yet until that fact is grappled with and clearly understood there can be no material improvement in the workers' condition. It is unfortunate, of course, that the workers do not understand. It makes the task of those who are concerned with the overthrow of capitalism, and the emancipation of the working class from wage-slavery, very difficult. The results of their work seem so very slow a-coming. And some of them tire and drop out of the movement, and others—the Irvings and the McNabs of the SDF for example—curse the stupidity of the working class, while others again—the Hyndmans and Quelches and Hardies and the rest—wary of the work, endeavour to secure some immediate consolation by pandering to the ignorance they once may have thought to dispel, and so simply increase the difficulties in the way.

The irreconcilable few

Only the few remain in the forefront of the fight, waging unceasing battle for their class. These are they who, belonging themselves to the working class, have been at pains to obtain information as to the causes of the ignorance of their fellows; who have seen how, for generation after generation they have been oppressed and misled, sent off upon a barren quest by one set of supposed friends, confused by the actions and instruction of another set; now buoyed up with the hope of happiness, now plunged into the apathy of disappointment and despair. Knowing these things the few set out with no delusions upon the score of the reception their propaganda will receive at the hands of their class, and are not downcast and peevish when the results desired fail to materialise as quickly as they wish.

We of The Socialist Party of Great Britain are of this few. Our mission is simple. We have to proceed with our educational propaganda until the working class have understood the fundamental facts of their position—the facts that because they do not own the means by which they live they are commodities on the market, never bought unless the buyers (the owners of the means of life) can see a profit to themselves in the transaction, always sold when the opportunity offers because in that only can the necessaries of life be obtained. We have to emphasise the fact that no appreciable change is possible in the working-class condition while they remain commodities, and that the only method by which the alteration can be wrought is by the working class taking the means of life out of the hands of those who at present hold them, and whose private ownership is the cause of the trouble. Before this can occur the workers will have to understand the inevitable opposition of interests between them and the capitalist class, who, because of their ownership of the means of life, are able to

exploit them, so that they will not make the mistake of voting into power, as they have always done hitherto, the representatives of the interests of those owning the means of life, because those who dominate political power dominate also the armed forces that keep the working class in subjection.

The justification of hostility

Therefore are we in opposition to all other political parties, holding on irrefutable evidence, that these other parties are confusing what must be clear to working-class minds before a change can be effected. This is our mission, and we shall conduct it with all the energy we have at our command. We know that the row we have to hoe is likely to be a long one. That does not affright us—because we know that were the row twice as long it would have to be hoed. There is no dodging the duty. There are no short cuts. Naturally, however, we wish the work to be covered as soon as possible, and that is why we oppose and expose those gentlemen who, sometimes with the best of intentions, blur the issue that must be kept unblurred, and so prolong our labours.

That is our position. If it contains flaws we shall be glad to hear of them. Meanwhile we regret that the entrance of the "Labour" men into the best club in Europe is not a Socialist victory and cannot be a Labour triumph. Labour only triumphs where Socialism wins. Meanwhile also, those who thought that the entrance of Burns into ministerial position would result in administration to the advantage of the unemployed should note that the Local Government Board has refused to sanction that portion of the loan applied for from Tottenham which was intended to meet the difference between the cost of work performed by a contractor and its cost if executed by the local unemployed. And those who thought that the advent of a new Liberal administration implied a large-hearted and sympathetic Labour policy should observe that sixty men have been sent to prison for five days each, and fifteen to one month each, for taking up collections in the street during unemployed demonstrations.

(February 1906)