

## **Fake Labour Government. The puppet show**

The workers, the producers of wealth, are poor because they are robbed; they are robbed because they may not use the machinery of wealth production except on terms dictated by the owners, the propertied class. The remedy for working class poverty and other social ills is the transfer of ownership of these means of production from the Capitalist Class to society. That, in a few words, is the case for Socialism.

The work of rebuilding society on this new basis cannot be started until power is in the hands of a Socialist working class, and that cannot be until many millions have been convinced of the need for change and are broadly agreed on the way to set to work to bring it about.

It is just here that the Socialist meets with an objection which is in appearance reasonable enough. Many who would accept the foregoing remarks can go with us no further.

Is it not better, they say, in view of the certainty that Socialism cannot be introduced at once, to devote much, if not all, our energy to making the best of Capitalism, and getting "something now"? By "something now" they mean higher wages, increased State protection against destitution through illness or unemployment, and other like proposals. It may then come as a surprise to them that we also believe in getting something now. We differ in that we are not willing to subordinate Socialist propaganda to the demand for reforms of Capitalism, and in that we strongly hold that the best way to get these things is by the revolutionary activity of an organisation of revolutionaries. In other words, the quickest and easiest method of getting reforms from the ruling class is to let them see that it will endanger their position to refuse.

While we recognise that Socialism is the *only* permanent solution, we are not among those who consider that the Capitalists are simply unable to afford better conditions for the workers. A comparison between the total income from property, and the petty cost of doles and relief, shows the falsity of that somewhat common notion. On the one hand the workers would, if they ceased to struggle, soon find that there is still room for a worsening of their conditions, and on the other hand were they free from the mental blindness which prevents them from striking a blow when and where it would be most damaging, they might, even within Capitalism, raise their standard of living and diminish their insecurity. Unfortunately they do not yet see the brutal facts of the class struggle, and too often allow themselves to be paralysed in action by their belief in the supposed community of interest between them and their exploiters, by their response to every deceitful appeal in the name of patriotism, and by their lack of confidence in their own powers and intelligence. They will put up a straight fight against their employers, but they have not yet seen through the more subtle hostility of the newspapers, the politicians, and all the other defenders of the employing class who pose as neutrals because it makes their influence more deadly. The employers and their hired defenders know well enough that your gain is often their loss, and they therefore have good reason to persuade you not to seize the opportunities that offer of raising your wages or reducing your hours. But many who talk about the beauties of an "advanced programme of social reforms" seem not to have realised that if such things are to be of any worth to you necessitate at first the

dipping into the profits of the other class. Various well-meaning persons may preach arbitration and conciliation, but you know well enough that sweet words do not, as a rule, charm employers into giving higher wages. They will not give up any part of what they hold except under pressure one kind of pressure is fear; the fear that refusal to spend *part* of their on reforms will encourage revolutionary agitation for the seizure of the *whole*. There is supposed to be another way of getting "something now." It is to assist into office a non-revolutionary party like the Labour Party.

It is pleaded at the moment on that Party's behalf that it is "in office but not in power," and that its weaknesses arise from that one fact due to causes beyond its control. Within limits this is true, but why in such circumstances was office accepted? It can hardly be questioned that an official opposition, 192 strong, bent on hampering the Government could have influenced legislation not less than when actually in office. In fact, however, the Labour Party was not free to choose. It dared not refuse office; it dare not while in office attack the roots of Capitalist privilege, and had it continued in opposition to Baldwin's Government it would not have dared to obstruct as a means of compelling the granting of concessions. The reasons for its impotence in each of these situations are the same. Its programme and policy, its supporters, the basis of its organisation, and the ground upon which it chose to fight elections all combined to commit it to the administering of Capitalism as distinct from treating the present opportunity merely as a prelude to the fight for Socialism.

From the circumstance that the bulk of the members of the Labour Party do not accept Socialism as a present political issue, but at best only as a hope for the future, it would be plainly suicidal for them to talk of throwing down a challenge to the Capitalist Class. The only alternative is to do as the Labour Party are trying to do. They are trying to run the Capitalist system better than the older parties have done.

We can we can readily concede that as administrators the Labour men will prove themselves no less intelligent and capable than their predecessors, and probably more receptive of new ideas and methods than the men who made and mismanaged the war.

But the essence of our opposition to this policy is that except in quite minor respects there is only one way of administering Capitalism—the Capitalist way. Ultimately it is the economic organisation of society which dictates the broad lines of policy and breaks those who ignore them. The problems which present themselves for settlement, such as war, unemployment, poverty, arise from the very nature of the present social system. They may be dealt with in more than one way, but they cannot be treated in a manner satisfactory to the workers without first destroying Capitalism.

Support of the unemployed at comparatively trifling cost is, from the Capitalist viewpoint, a solution of the unemployment problem. *Their* problem is to avoid the risk of riot and revolt and their policy succeeds. War is but an extension of ordinary commercial competition, and poverty is both the effect and the necessary condition of capitalist wealth and monopoly.

Even where a Labour Government is able to introduce certain alleviations, these must be paid for in the sacrifice of political independence. The removal of the "Gap" is the price of consent to plans of the Conservative majority for the Navy and Air Forces. To argue that these objectionable measures would have been carried through

by the last or any other Capitalist Government misses the point of our criticism. Capitalism produces certain evils. These evils, have, by their persistence, discredited three Governments since 1918. A Labour Government which seeks to carry on is certain not to be able to remove the evils, and under the added embarrassment of having roused high hopes, will be discredited, too, and the unhappy sequel will be that those who openly defend the present system will with some show of reason instance the failure of the Labour Party as proof that there is no solution, and many of the Labour men will drift or be forced into offering the same defence themselves.

It is to the general situation and not to the weakness or cowardice of individuals that we must look for an explanation of the actions of the Labour Government, many of which have already given obvious displeasure to their more advanced supporters.

Their term began with a strike of locomotive men, who, despite their solidarity, were compelled to accept wage reductions. So far from intervening to obtain "something now" for the strikers, Mr. MacDonald appointed as Colonial Secretary Mr. J. H. Thomas, who quite openly condemned them and hoped and intrigued for their defeat.

The miners, too, are putting forward a demand that their wages be raised to the 1914 standard, but the Editor of the *Labour Magazine* (January, 1924), an official Labour Party organ, can offer them no better assistance than an appeal in the following terms:—"We are sure that the miners will not embarrass the first Labour Government by pressing untimely demands . . ."

It would appear at least reasonable for the miners to receive slightly more than a starvation wage before the non-producers who own the mines should be allowed to draw their millions of pounds of profits. Even if the Labour Party, like MacDonald, are definitely committed to retaining the profit-making system, it cannot be doubted that they would, if they conveniently could, raise the miners wages; but because they are "administering capitalism" such a demand is of necessity an "untimely" one. What the miners get, even if it be given legislative endorsement, will be the result of their own organisation and action.

When the Dockers came out on strike for increases which were generally admitted even by some of the Dock employers to be long overdue, the Government had mails unloaded by Naval ratings and had made all preparations for unloading foodstuffs, etc., had the strike continued. This does not necessarily imply on their part a positive wish to break the strike. What it does mean is that this is one of the duties inevitably forced upon those, whatever their beliefs, who would undertake to administer Capitalism.

The strike had to be ended or countered. If the Labour Government had refused to act it would have forfeited the right to govern. Through Mr. Shaw, therefore, pressure was brought to bear on the Dockers' representatives to accept certain terms which were actually slightly worse than those finally granted by the employers.

*"It was stated yesterday that the settlement terms follow the 'private suggestion' made by the Minister of Labour last week, with the exception that July instead of June was*

*first proposed for the operation of the second shilling increase." (Daily News, 22 February, 1924.)*

As for the nature of the "private suggestion" referred to, the Worker (March 1st) quotes as follows from Mr. Bevin's speech to the delegates:—

*"The Government is responsible for the moving of the mails. They have refrained from using soldiers, naval ratings, blacklegs or force of any kind. But they are being driven up against it, and soon will have to take the choice of exercising their powers or going out of office. That was the choice, and there is no need to beat about the bush. We discussed the position with the Government . . . I want you to see the influence on our judgment in the course of the developments that have gone on."*

With regard to the unemployed, Mr. MacDonald, in his opening speech on policy in the House of Commons, made it quite plain that he is not going to assist them at the expense of the propertied class.

*"We are not going to diminish industrial capital in order to provide relief." (Daily Herald, 13 February.). This was received with "renewed cheers."*

That attitude is explained by an interview MacDonald gave to an unemployed deputation in Edinburgh, at which he is reported as saying,

*"The possibility of financial panic was also a factor to be taken into account . . . For the immediate future good administration was requisite to win the confidence of the financial groups and ensure stability." (Worker, 9 February.)*

It is evident that to gain and keep the "confidence of the financial groups" rules out all measures aimed at depriving the Capitalist Class of any part of what they hold, except on terms pleasing to them.

Dr. Salter, in the *New Leader*, lays down a general principle on the wage question:

*"It is quite certain that under present world circumstances and in view of the competition in outside markets, no new and higher rates of wages in any industry or in any locality should be imposed by law without careful preliminary expert investigation." (7 March, 1924.)*

It would doubtless be "untimely" and "embarrassing" to suggest careful enquiry into the need for supporting an idle class of property owners out of the product of industry.

But the question of armaments has shown up in its most glaring aspect the weakness of the Labour Government, its complete dependence on those who pull the strings, and the truth of the Socialist contention that those who accept office on such terms can be no more than caretakers of the Capitalist system. In the first place it was no accident that anti-working class imperialists like Lord Chelmsford and Brigadier-General Thompson should have gone to the Admiralty and the Air Ministry respectively. Labour members may be allowed to prattle about the Sermon on the Mount, provided they keep the fighting forces up to the level require by the

international situation. Thus we have Mr. "Pacifist" Ammon at the Admiralty announcing the intention of laying down five new cruisers and two destroyers, and MacDonald actually defending it as a means of providing employment. Of the whole batch of Labour men only one, the Rev. H. Dunnico, voted against the Government; 161 voted with them, and the rest abstained. Some of the latter will perhaps follow Dunnico on the next occasion. The internal anarchy of the I.L.P. is well illustrated by their inability to control the M.Ps. A message of congratulation to Dunnico was passed unanimously by the 55 delegates attending the half-yearly conference of the Northern Counties Divisional Council of the I.L.P. It conveyed to him "Heartiest congratulations on being the only M.P. who stood loyally to the principles which our party hold."—(*Daily News*, February 27th). It was left to Liberals like Kenworthy to protest.

The Government which will not "diminish industrial capital in order to provide relief" for the unemployed has also agreed to "a big scheme of Air Defence," involving an additional expenditure of £2,500,000 for 1924-25, and with the promise that "the total of air Estimates may be expected to rise for some years."—(Lord Thompson, *Daily Herald*, March 8th.)

The *Herald* uses the word "Defence" on its front page, yet in its editorial of the same day it endorses MacDonald's view, supported by numerous "experts", that no aircraft building can really provide any security whatever against hostile raids.

Much has been made by Labour Party apologists (e.g., *New Leader*, March 14th) of the fact that the gross expenditure on the three services is less than last year, but as Lansbury points out, this is merely due to the changing technique of warfare:

*"It is said we are to spend less on armaments as a whole; it is true, because the more deadly weapons, such as bombs, gas, aeroplanes and submarines, are cheaper and yet more deadly than the obsolete Dreadnoughts and other costly weapons."* (*Daily Herald*, 15 March.)

Lansbury's further reply to those who pretend to see something different in the Labour Party's attitude to armaments is equally forcible.

*"But far more important is it to realise that exactly the same kind of speeches as are being made to-day from the Government benches in defence of armaments, were made during the years 1906-14 by Sir E. Grey, Lord Haldane, Mr. Winston Churchill, and Mr. Lloyd George."* (*Ibid.*)

The belief, which is now the bedrock of the Labour Party's policy, that peace can be ensured by preparing for war, is not new, and it has not exactly been confirmed by history.

The truth is that competition in disposing of the surplus products of each Capitalist country in the world's markets, and rivalry in the struggle for possession of raw materials and trade routes, lead inevitably to war. The Labour Government are now busy considering schemes for reducing the cost of production in the Empire's staple export industries. In a capitalist world that means more embittered competition, and a consequently increased probability of early war with those who feel themselves being

throttled in the commercial struggle. Those who have taken on the administration of Capitalism must also face the responsibility of preparing for the conflicts that are the product of Capitalism.

The true cause of modern wars was bluntly exposed by a French General, Marshal Lyauty, speaking at a Banquet of the National Congress of Councillors of Foreign Trade at Marseilles in October, 1922.—(*Star*, October 31st, 1922.)

*"French soldiers are fighting in Morocco to acquire territory in which rise rivers capable of supplying power for electrification schemes which will prove of great advantage to French trade. When we have acquired the last zone of cultivatable territory, when we have nothing but mountains in front of us, we shall stop."*

*"Our object is commercial and economic. The military expedition in Morocco is a means, not an end. Our object is the extension of foreign trade."*

Without foreign markets capitalist industry in Great Britain perishes. Without protection by dominant armaments those markets are prizes to be had for the asking. Those Labour men who believe that they can promote capitalist trade without needing to arm in order to hold what they gain, are living in a fool's paradise. They have to build cruisers and bombing planes to overawe and if need be to shatter the forces and cities of whatever States come into conflict with Great Britain.

We Socialists see that wars are unavoidable if the interests of the Capitalist Class are to be protected, but we are not concerned in protecting them. We recognise that under Capitalism the workers have nothing to lose in war except their lives and nothing to gain, and so we urge them not to support Capitalist wars or the preparation for them.

Our aim as Socialists is the destruction of the Capitalist system of society, and we are therefore unalterably hostile to all political parties which seek to gain control of Parliament for any other purpose than the establishment of Socialism. The Labour Party is such a party; it has gone into office in the custody of the Liberal Party; its so-called Socialists are puppets dancing on the strings of the industrial and financial capitalists behind the scenes; its Pacifists are merely decoys who will allay suspicion while the militarists prepare for war; its wild men are a convenient buffer to receive the blows of the workers so soon as they tire of waiting for something to be done to relieve their misery. As has been well said, the Labour Party has taken over a bankrupt concern; not, however, to wind it up, but to carry it on. As well as the troubles of previous administrations, the present Cabinet is threatened with a promising crop of revolts. The men of peace grown suddenly stiff-necked and high-handed in office will surely come into early conflict with those of their late "comrades" who were too honest to desire or too insignificant to be offered posts in the Government. The genuine disapproval of the former and the ill-concealed venom of some of the others are likely to make for turbulence rather than tranquillity. So that even if our first Labour Government is only a Puppet Show, it should merit the distinction conceded by one observer, of being the best show in London.

(April 1924)