

LABOUR UNREST.

What are to be the next developments in the direction of democratic control in this country? To those possessed of the gift for reading the signs of the times an unparalleled opportunity offers for its exercise, for a truly extraordinary state of affairs prevails. An alignment of social and economic forces is in operation which would under any combination of circumstances have been remarkable and inexplicable, but as following upon a devastating and impoverishing war, is simply bewildering.

It is futile to fulminate upon the unreasonableness of labour. In so far as that charge is justified, it is but another aspect of the problem to be dealt with, or a different way of stating the question that demands an answer. Men in masses do not become unreasonable except under the influence of anger or indignation. Why they are angry, is the question that should engage the attention of the philosophic mind; not the means they employ—mild or explosive—to express that anger. One of the lessons that experience should have taught us is that when men make unreasonable demands it is because some reasonable thing has been denied them; and that when they attempt the impossible it is because the possible has been artificially made difficult or unattainable.

The riddle is after all not hard to read. A slight acquaintance with the stream of thought that pervades the labour movement is all that is required to reveal the fact that the fierce indignation that underlies the prevailing unrest has its root in the unearned incomes of the privileged classes—the royalty-owners and the land-owners. Labour is becoming observant. It sees with its own eyes that a toll is being levied on the production of the country by those who give no service in return. It knows that to pay this levy a deduction has always been made from the natural reward of industry, and it is determined that this condition of things will endure no longer. It seems fairly clear that the rebellion of the wage-earners is due to an up-rush of feeling caused by their having caught a glimpse of the knot that threatens to strangle them. They see all around them families in which graceful idling and parasitic living have become traditions. The vast ducal estates and game-hunting preserves, the city ground-rents and mining royalties that are constantly being paid to the present representatives of the titled aristocracy—are facts, the significance of which is steadily filtering into their minds. In short, the contrast between what Carlyle called "The dandies and the drudges" has assumed in these days a more dramatic form than it ever wore. The dandiacal body have acquired through generations of leisured culture the utmost degree of refinement in speech and manners. The drudges have been defrauded by ages of toil and the constant companionship of poverty, of the remotest chance of cultivating those physical, intellectual, and spiritual graces, of the value of which they are doubtless as acutely conscious as their more privileged brethren can be. Is it surprising then, that a sub-conscious revulsion with the life-conditions that have produced their own unsatisfactory selves should bring forth a violent protest couched in the only language known to

this dumb and inarticulate "sect," the language of noise, upheaval and revolution?

If the British nation were as wise as we wish it to be, it would do one thing and do it quickly. It would at once let the sect of the drudges know, not by words but by actions, that the special privileges hitherto enjoyed by the dandiacal body at the expense of the said sect of the drudges, is to come with all possible speed to an end. For here we believe we have hunted down the particular microbe or bacterium that has caused the social fever which manifests itself in so many and various ways. A sense of injustice, like a poisonous germ in the blood, may produce not only fever-heat, but delirium, hallucination, madness. To kill the enemy-germ, or, to speak without metaphor, to remove the sense of injustice, is in the long run the only way to allay the fever and all its manifestations and symptoms.

A. MACKENDRICK.

MR. WEDGWOOD ON THE PROFITEERING BILL.

(From his speech in the Debate on the Second Reading, House of Commons, August 11th)

There is one thing only which would make me vote for this Bill. That is if it were really going to deal with the prime profiteer of the lot behind the combines, the man who owns the land. The man who owns the land is sacred in this House, and his interests, at any rate, must not be touched. If a private person wants to start to build cottages and has asked for land let at 30s. an acre, and he is asked £300 or £400 an acre for that land, is that man profiteering? He is only asking about 100 times what he ought to get—that is, the value for which it is rated. That landlord is the biggest profiteer, but he will escape entirely. When land is wanted for allotments and ten times the present rental is asked will he be a profiteer? This Government would not tolerate any interference with the sacred rights of landlords. I am told that this Bill has been introduced in view of the Pontefract Election, and that some hon. Members are voting for it because it will be popular. When the country has had a taste of this measure, when the traders have been haled up before the new Star Chambers in all our towns, and some of them have been punished for a crime which is not theirs, and probably have been tried by their own competitors in business, its popularity will be gone. The members of these tribunals will not be people trained in the law, and they are going to be bodies similar to the military tribunals during the War. I do not think this Act will be possible, and the only part of it that will be possible is the provision that it will end in six months' time. The idea that the Government think they can achieve popularity by passing a law which they know is unjust and incapable of universal application is one which will not go down with the country. You start by interfering with the laws of supply and demand, and they always come back upon you and hit you upon the head. This proposal interferes with the natural competition of men to supply articles to the consumer in competition one with the other. It interferes with the laws of nature, and the laws of nature will beat you every time. If you go back to the natural laws of supply and demand, free competition and imports, then by that means only you will succeed in eliminating the profiteer.