

## PENITENCE ON THE LABOUR BENCHES

WHEN a minority party, thanks to the loaded dice of our voting system, gains such a monopoly of power that Parliament becomes a mere registration-office for its Bills the leaders are no doubt saved much labour. There are, however, some inconveniences. If the panaceas do not fulfil expectations the failure cannot be attributed to the obstruction of opponents, and in a national emergency, when the government needs the co-operation of all honest men, it cannot depend upon the allegiance of those whom its spokesmen deride as useless and who are virtually denied representation.

At the recent Annual Conference of the Labour Party, the Lord President of the Council, Rt. Hon. Herbert Morrison, M.P., exhorted the country to an intensive productive effort. It was his "Turn-out-the-goods-or-bust" speech. Passages in it suggest that some responsible members of the Labour Party are beginning to feel both these inconveniences. Mr. Ernest Bevin's almost hysterical welcome to the latest offer of "capitalist" U.S.A. suggests we may be nearer to a national emergency than the public realises. Mr. Morrison still officially supported the panaceas, of course, and he still denounced scapegoats, but the support was rather a formality than a burning conviction, and the scapegoats were left so ill-defined that they were not necessarily identified with his political opponents. Indeed, he directly accused only the "unofficial" strikers who are usually considered to belong to Leftist groups.

The Lord President's appeal to the middle classes was remarkable. He admitted that many of them were now subjected to intolerable strain and some were worse off than the Trades Unionists. This may have been an offset to the political ineptitudes of Mr. Shinwell. But it is likely that it reflected a feeling among some Labour leaders (after a series of shocks, no doubt) that the capitalist, properly so called, is not a useless but an indispensable member of the community and that it becomes infinitely easier for the work of government if private persons will save and risk their own capital in productive enterprise instead of waiting for the clumsy and coercive measures of official machinery to provide the "better management and better tools" that Mr. Morrison recognises to be so urgent.

The government are, in fact, faced with the problem that confronts all power groups which tax the self-reliant classes out of existence. Almost all citizens, having been reduced to dependence on politicians, the politicians now exhort them to display the virtues which grow only under conditions of independence. The freeman will exert energy and inventiveness on behalf of himself, his family, his friends; he will not exert them on behalf of politicians who take all the credit—and profit—for themselves.

The real question which Mr. Morrison posed in his speech but did not answer was: How can both "workers" and "capitalists" be induced to produce more abundantly under present conditions of taxation and official restriction which treat production as an injury to society? It is true that his references to "opportunities for service," "joyful co-operation," etc., offered formal answers, but he showed no real confidence in these well-worn slogans. He must know that they appeal much more to those in easy circumstances, such as bishops, politicians and the jury of Socialist matrons which directs *The Times* than to clear-thinking, hard-working men of any class. Despite all the propaganda of the B.B.C., so long as Englishmen have

common sense and wit enough to prefer to listen to Tommy Handley rather than the talks of the official experts, such Strength-through-joy methods will not serve. When Mr. Deakin, Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, flatly warned "people on the political side of the movement" to keep their noses out of "the question of incentives," the reporter (or reportress) of *The Times* registered shock; but most of his audience must have realised that he expressed the real feelings of those who matter. It must be more and more apparent to the government that the only possible alternative to the profit motive is the fear motive. The Trades Unions know very well that this would involve their suppression, and this leaves the question of incentives just where it was.

Most people, following the example of newspapers and experts, will treat this as an entirely intellectual problem. Too much insistence upon this aspect is likely to deter the warm-hearted altruist and leave it to the expert who so often finds it more profitable to ignore the fundamentals. We believe, with Vauvenargues, that great thoughts, although they come *via* the head, emanate from the heart. Social questions of importance are all moral as well as intellectual questions; they need courage and honesty for their solution, just as much as cleverness. If some of our leaders would consult their own sense of justice rather than their boards of experts the answers would not be so difficult to find. And if the solution should entail the political martyrdom of its exponent, would not this conform to the universal pattern of human progress?

The radio version of a play on the subject of the martyr of Harper's Ferry seems to have opened the eyes of some young people to the fact that true heroism can walk the earth on ordinary feet and yet by deliberate sacrifice stir millions to generous action. "How many a man who was contemplating suicide has now something to live for!" exclaims Thoreau when news of his friend's arrest reached the Northern States. Must it always be true that "for every nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue there is only one virtuous man?" Can modern England never produce a John Brown, "a man of rare commonsense and directness of speech, standing up persistently and effectively for the dignity of human nature, knowing himself for a man, and the equal of any and all governments"?

Mr. Morrison has on occasion changed his opinion. Might he not revise his speech in some such works as the following:—

"I spoke before as a politician. Let me now speak as an ordinary citizen. I warn you to dispel the illusion that coercive power over you can ever be used for your benefit, that politicians can give you more than you can earn by your own energy, wisdom and virtue. If you would obtain the things you need or pay the debts you have been foolish enough to allow us to fasten upon you it is useless to expect us to tell you how. You who produce by direct labour of hand or brain, and you who produce by saving and risking your capital, instead of striving as enemies, you should combine against us who impose ruinous taxation and restrictions upon you both.

"When I talked of 'drones' and 'parasites,' of 'people engaged in activities which are a hindrance to the national effort,' I conveniently forgot the vast army of officials who interpose between producers and their natural reward, between exchangers and a free market, between intelligence and its application to the power of labour. I did not remind you that governments by their very nature can

act *only* by restriction; that they can aid production only by removing restrictions imposed by others; and that they never do this unless forced by the people to do so.

"Some years ago, when I was Leader of the London County Council, I recognised in our land system the basic restriction-law of our society, the law which enables parasites to monopolise the first essential to all production. But now the instinct of the politician warns me to keep quiet about a reform which at one stroke could so simplify government that you could dispense with all but an insignificant number of politicians, officials and their vast army of hangers-on.

"I told you, working men, that you could expect no more doles from 'squeezing the incomes of the rich.' I did not enlarge upon the ignoble principle of either robbing them of what they have truly earned, or making you a sharer in ill-gotten gains. I told you the chief tax-

collector had already taken all he could from the rich. I did not tell you that he had consistently overlooked that vast source of revenue which is truly yours by right of creation: the rent of your native land. How much rent would there be if all the population consisted of landlords and officials? You, Englishmen, are born heirs to the rent of your country, as you are born heirs to its glory and traditions. Each man must, in justice, pay rent for his holding, but each must, in justice, participate in the whole. Demand this, your property, for public revenue and demand the removal of all those dishonest taxes which maintain armies of parasites and constitute the real impediment to production! But you must do this for yourselves, not expect politicians to do it for you. God gave them no more wisdom or virtue than other men, and he gave them no immunity from the corruption which inevitably attends power!"

F. D. P.

## WHERE DENMARK LEADS

THE adherents of the land values and free trade movement in Denmark have a platform and a sounding board, as well as an influence, by which they are to be envied. It consists in the independent political party, the *Justice Union*, which proclaims the policy of the "just State" based on the freedom of the individual and his equal rights, the removal of all obstructions on trade and industry, the full appropriation of the rent of land as the community's revenue and the abolition of taxation on the work of man's hands. Its three representatives in Parliament are Dr. Viggo Starcke, Mr. Knud Tholstrup and Mr. Sören Olesen, and the party has its active branches in all parts of the country. The growth of its membership, the flow of youth to its standard, the ready and considerable attendance at its meetings, the increasing circulation of its periodicals are the marks of its progress which have been particularly noteworthy during the past twelve months. Public support was tested at the recent elections for the Upper House when the votes given for the Party were three times as many as on the previous occasion; and this, although the franchise for the Upper House is limited to persons of 35 years or over. There is no doubt that when the next election for the Lower House takes place, the young also exercising the vote, the *Justice Union* will record a still more striking gain. The party has the advantage of the uncompromising stand it takes against restrictionism in all its forms, for certainly the popular revolt against the controls and regulations is steadily growing and the people are beginning to apprehend that the "planned economy" is a delusion and a snare, working towards economic and financial disaster. The reply to all that is equal freedom and equal opportunity, and in this nation-wide debate the "Georgeists," as they are familiarly called, are winning recognition and respect for the principles they advocate.

The forerunner of this well-revived agitation was that which led to the passage of the Acts of 1922 and 1926 by the coalition government of Radical Liberals and Social Democrats, providing for the periodic valuation of all land separately from buildings and improvements as well as some measure of land value taxation for both national and local purposes—sound beginnings, the details of which have been repeatedly described in *LAND & LIBERTY*. The legislation on which to build further stands to the credit of these parties. They still have land-value taxation as a "plank of their platform"—the Moderate Liberals are also genial in their attitude—but performance not keeping

step with promise, the *Justice Union* took shape and entered politics on its own account. And the Danes have a system of proportional representation, not perfect, if you like, but yet efficient enough to make representation correspond with the number of the votes that are cast. On that score, talking of the difficulties that attend the formation of new parties in this country a franchise system rendered still more iniquitous by the £150 deposit, I found it a matter of astonishment to the Danes that we could have in our Parliament a party with an overwhelming majority of the seats and yet a minority of the votes at the election. It could not happen there and to them it was a travesty of democracy.

The parent organisation of the Danish movement is the long-established Henry George Union, serving the propaganda without any party-political associations and claiming the support of all who believe in its aims and objects—its position the same as that of the United Committee, the International Union and the Leagues for Land Value Taxation in this country. Its contribution to the advance of the cause has been immense and its work goes on, as necessary as ever, for the making of opinion among all sections of the people. To-day its president is Mr. P. C. Pedersen, its secretary is Mr. Dan Björner, and Mr. F. Folke is the editor of its journal, *Grundskyld* (the Land-Due). On the purely educational side is the Ecotechnical School, teaching the Henry George social philosophy, under the directorship of Mrs. Caroline Björner, which ran some 60 classes last year and is now preparing its autumn and winter sessions. The *Justice Union* has four periodicals, the weekly *Vejen Frem* (the Way Forward), the monthly *Ret og Frihed* (Justice and Freedom) and the journals of its "working-men" and youth sections, and one is to be established for the women's section. A large band of writers and speakers is engaged in this intense activity which, with meetings in all parts, includes the sale and circulation of much literature.

### NEXT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

A fortnight's stay in Denmark during June gave me exceptional opportunities to learn more of all this work and join in it by the kindness and courtesy of many friends, met at a number of gatherings and individually. A main object of the journey was to consult with them on the prospects of the next International Conference and to report that in much correspondence reaching the office, Denmark was the chosen country. That recommendation was received with enthusiasm everywhere I went, and its