

THE FUNDAMENTAL OF LIBERALISM

Mr. G. E. Owen, of Weybridge, recently conducted a discussion group under the auspices of the Walton and Weybridge Liberal Association. We are indebted to Mr. Owen for copies of the notes he circulated at each meeting of his group. The instruction he gave, as well as his manner of approach, is most illuminating. We should like to dwell on his material by quoting at large. Here, for example, are his reflections on Liberty:—

"The battle for the cause of liberty is a continuous one. At one time it turned on the issue of religious liberty. That was thought to be decided by a toleration which gave freedom to all denominations. At another time civil liberty was the objective. That was seemingly achieved by a doctrine and practice of common civil rights appertaining to all men alike, declared and guaranteed by the substance and procedure of civil law. At yet another time the issue was political liberty: a system of parliamentary democracy under which every citizen shared in the determination of the common affairs of the community appeared to resolve the issue. But none of these were final victories; the liberties gained must be continuously defended. Nor must we regard those liberties as separate entities, they are all part of one liberty. The struggle of men is now, and always has been, for liberty itself; their desire is for a new world, in which sinister interests of privilege would be removed and evils of injustice and inequality corrected. The particular liberties achieved have been due to the form which the obstacle to that goal assumed at varying times. Thus we now come to join battle on the issue of economic liberty. It is another stage in a continuous process, and must be resolved by the same faithful adherence to principles; it is not a battle of a group or class, and must grant to others the same freedom that we claim for ourselves. A conscious recognition of this fact is the fundamental of liberalism, which will not only determine our action in the economic field, but lead us to struggle for the maintenance and extension of the older liberties in the changed conditions of our time."

Mr. Owen is now prospective Liberal candidate for Chertsey. He has been a keen party member for several years, but is more radical than some of his colleagues. He expressed his views in a letter some months ago and we are given leave to quote in part from that letter:—

"I was never converted to the Liberal Party—but, rather, went out of my way to find an Association to join, because I sought means of expressing my deep liberal convictions. But throughout the time I have been with the party, I have been aware of a fundamental insufficiency; it has never seemed to me that I was serving the purpose for which I joined. The expected affinity of ideals has been sadly lacking.

"I have been at pains to find the reason for this complacency within the party, and apparent apathy outside, toward the great cause which it proclaims.

"In groping for the satisfaction of my own convictions I came across the Henry George School of Social Science. In the philosophy of Henry George I found a true liberalism, and although his teaching with regard to the ownership of land ran contrary to views previously held and never before questioned, I am compelled to accept his reasoning. Attending Courses at the Scheel, I found that affinity of purpose for which I sought. Week after week our study group met, in winter and heat wave alike, to eagerly pursue the truth; one felt the deep glow of enthusiasm as the full implications of Henry George's philosophy became apparent.

"Here is a radical liberalism which stirs one to action with its promise of the establishment of economic liberty; with its vision of an equality which flows from Justice; with its attack upon the root cause of social injustice."

Mr. Owen has attended the three courses of the Henry George School at 4 Great Smith Street, and is so enthusiastic about the value and importance of this teaching that he is going on to the fourth (Tutor's) class, at the same time undertaking to conduct a basic course in his own area with *Progress and Poverty* as the textbook.

DEMOCRACY DEFINED

By Frederick Adams

"Democracy properly understood stands for the equal right of all to the use of nature's storehouse, which would affirm the existence of equal, natural, individual rights, seeking the further evolution of society in the direction of its past evolution until society shall have become fully subservient to the welfare of the individuals composing it: seeking to attain such general welfare through the removal of the remaining infractions of the natural and equal rights of all individuals—the freedom of each to exercise all his faculties as he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other; the right of each to the fullest opportunities for the exercise of his faculties, limited only by the equal right of others; and the unlimited right of each to benefit by his own beneficial acts, reward being proportioned to service rendered.

"Democracy may provisionally be defined as a certain principle of association, a certain basis of social union, and may, perhaps, best be understood by comparing it with its antithesis, Aristocracy or Oligarchy.

"Aristocracy, too, whatever else it may be held to include, denotes a certain principle of association, a certain basis of social union. The essential and characteristic element of Aristocracy is Privilege and License: for it involves the recognition and enforcement of the special claims of some, of a privileged class or caste.

"The essential and characteristic of Democracy, on the other hand, is Justice or Liberty; for it involves the recognition and enforcement of the equal claims of all.

"And this, as our study of Universal History of Social Evolution forces us to recognise, is in truth the goal towards which 'the most uniform, the most ancient, and the most permanent tendency to be found in history,' constantly impels mankind.

"The goal towards which, despite temporary aberrations (like silly national dividend stunts) and transient periods of reaction, the civilisation of Western Europe constantly impels mankind, may be summed up in one word—Democracy—using this term to denote a social system, as well as a social faith, based upon Justice, the Law of Liberty, the Golden Rule of Righteousness, the enforcement of the equal claims of all to life, to liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness, and all that this involves.

"Justice, however, involves toleration, in the widest sense of the term: toleration of differences in religion and civilisation, in habits, manners, customs, laws, beliefs, attributes and aspirations.

"For jealous of his own liberty, of his own independence, of his own claim to his own life according to his own desires, the individual who accepts Justice as the basis of his Social Creed or Faith, will necessarily be impelled to respect the similar claims of others.

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