

## THE LABOUR PARTY'S PRONOUNCEMENT

THE LATEST restatement by the Labour Party of its policy is contained in a draft report entitled "The Old World and the New Society." It states a number of principles which are likely to command general assent. Particularly it bases itself on President Roosevelt's Four Freedoms (Message to Congress 6th January, 1941), and the Atlantic Charter. Whether the President would endorse the interpretation or the method of attaining his four freedoms is another matter.

The greatest weakness of the report is the excessive dose of rhetoric and metaphor in which it is embodied. It is sometimes extremely difficult to attach any meaning or any precise meaning to the phrases used. Here are some examples: The report says that in our society "there was no organic relation between effort and reward." This presumably means that "effort" was inadequately rewarded as a general rule. Then it continues: "Poverty and riches were the outcome not of ability and character but of the blind forces of the market." What are the blind forces of the market? They sound as if they were some kind of devil which bewitched people. The correct statement should read more like this: "The inequalities in the distribution of wealth resulted from the operation of economic law under the social conditions then existing." This is, of course, much less exciting and it leaves for determination the question what exactly were the social conditions which led to inequality in the distribution of wealth.

The nearest which the report gets to answering this question is to assert that all our troubles are due to living in an "unplanned society." This may be a statement of profound importance, but it certainly requires elucidation. Does it mean at the minimum that we failed to establish certain economic conditions which would have been sufficient to prevent inequality (or at least great inequality) in the distribution of wealth? Or does it mean that we are in a mess because the government did not direct and control every individual economic transaction? Or is there, perhaps, some intermediate stage which is considered desirable?

These questions are more than academic. The report says that "the nation must own and operate the essential instruments of production." What these are is not stated. It adds that "this common ownership does not commit us to a regimented bureaucracy." What is a regimented bureaucracy, and is it any better than a bureaucracy pure and simple? The straightforward question is: who is going to manage "the essential instruments of production" that the nation is to own? Is there any means of doing it except through a civil service, that is to say a bureaucracy?

The report says that "the basis of democracy . . . is planned production for community consumption." Democracy, we imagined, was a method of government under which the mass of the people had certain rights of determining the form and composition of the government of the country. And what is "community consumption"? Consumption is surely an individual act. The whole purpose of

economic life is the consumption or enjoyment by individuals of certain things which they desire. It is in its effect upon the individual that the acid test of any social system is to be found.

Talking of the years of the Great Depression the report says: "All over the world millions of men and women were unemployed, vast areas of production were left to waste, poverty was widespread, while every device that could restrict the potential wealth at our disposal was called into play." As a general statement this is not open to objection. It is a pity, however, that no attempt is made to explain the "organic relation" between idle natural resources and idle men. Not content with this plain statement the authors have to add: "An unplanned economic order went into a frenzy of unreasoning nationalism; everywhere the state-power was mobilized to maintain the interest of those who owned the instruments of production." The first part of this is incapable of logical analysis. What is an "unplanned order"? how does it get into a frenzy? and what is unreasoning nationalism? The latter part is intelligible, but it would have been more accurate to say that "legislation was passed with the intention of preserving the interests of some of those persons who owned the instruments of production." A further analysis would have shown that it was only the more powerful interests which got any benefit out of the various forms of protective and restrictive legislation. Many owners of factories and workshops and other means of production suffered severe loss or bankruptcy. Those who succeeded in gaining special privileges for themselves were generally the owners or part-owners of natural resources. Tin, rubber, coal, copper, steel, are some examples of primary materials the monopoly of which was fostered by governments. The legislation intended to benefit farmers, including growers not only of food but of various raw materials, in the long run went to the advantage of the landlords.

Except for this passage and another where it says that it would not be equitable to ask our people "to go back to a world in which there are mass unemployment and distressed areas, in which the ground-landlord and speculative builder can profiteer from the rebuilding of Britain," there is not a single mention of the land question beyond a reference to safeguarding the rights of natives in the colonies. Although it is admitted that the basis of local taxation is in urgent need of revision, there is not a word about the rating of site values; nor is there any mention of national taxation of land values, or even of a valuation of land which most town planners now admit to be an essential instrument of planning.

These are surely matters of basic importance, but the report in large part at least appears to have been drafted with a Marxian bias, and Marxians (unlike Marx) seldom seem to know that there is such a thing as a land question. In any case Marxian economics (so called) will not bear scientific examination and certainly provide no foundation for any rational action. The strength of the Labour

Movement in this country has been that it has remained free from the dialectical materialism and other vagaries of Marxism which have had so deplorable an effect upon the labour movements of Europe, and we hope it will remain so.

S. I.

## SCOTTISH LAND ENQUIRY

RT HON THOMAS JOHNSTONE, Secretary of State for Scotland, has announced the appointment of a Committee "To review the operation of land settlement schemes in Scotland and, in the light of the results achieved, to advise what changes in the system of tenure or of existing methods of land settlement are desirable, with particular reference to the social and economic welfare of smallholders and crofters."

The Secretary of State and his Council of ex-Secretaries on Post-War Problems feel that the time is ripe for a further review. The success or otherwise of land settlement schemes and of various types of holdings, both in the pre-war years and under war conditions, will be of value, not only in guiding settlement policy after the war, but in helping to solve problems as to the economic size of units for various forms of agricultural production, and how such units should be dovetailed into agricultural production generally. There are also problems peculiarly related to the economic and social welfare of the Highlands and Islands; and there is the question of settlement of ex-Servicemen after the war, which must be examined in the light of past experience.

Members of the Committee are: Lord Robertson, a senator of the College of Justice; Dr E. M. Barron, editor and proprietor of the *Inverness Courier*; Major Robert Bruce who was a prominent member of the Hilleary Committee of the Scottish Development Council; Mr J. Boyd Douglas, a well-known dairy farmer and chairman of the Kirkcudbright Agricultural Executive Committee; Mr J. Dunlop, formerly Commissioner for Small Holdings in the Board of Agriculture and is a Governor of the West of Scotland Agricultural College; Dr Gavin B. Henderson, a lecturer in history at the Glasgow University; and Mr Alex M. MacKay of Dornoch, a farmer and vice-Convenor of the Sutherland Agricultural Executive Committee.

Inquiries and offers of evidence should be addressed to Mr J. Nish, Department of Agriculture, St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, who has been appointed secretary to the Committee.

It is territorial monopoly that obliges men unwillingly to see vast tracts of land lying waste or negligently or imperfectly cultivated, while they are subjected to the miseries of want.—WILLIAM GODWIN, *Political Justice*, Book VIII., Chap. III.

A Free Copy of *Land & Liberty* is an invitation to become a subscriber. Monthly 2d. By Post, 3s. a year.