The British Socialist Labor Party
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THE BRITISH SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY

AT the general election in January, 1906, at which the then newly formed Campbell-Bannerman administration was returned to power, fifty-seven Labor representatives, of three different schools, were elected to the House of Commons. Twenty-nine of these were of the Independent Labor party, which has since become known as the Socialist group. Fourteen were miners' members and formed what has now come to be known as the Trade Union group. The third group, also of fourteen, was known as Liberal Labor, from its close and official connection with the Liberal party in and out of Parliament. The history of Labor representation from the election of Macdonald and Burt in 1874 to the return of these fifty-seven members at the last general election was briefly sketched in this journal two years ago;[1] and the purpose of the present article is to continue that history by tracing the development in this parliamentary Labor movement that took place between the opening of the Parliament of 1906, with the late Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as premier, and the incoming of the Asquith administration, April 8, 1908.

All three Labor groups obviously had their influence on the legislation and the administrative action of the Campbell-Bannerman government, in which the old-line Labor group was directly represented by John Burns, president of the Local Government Board. It is, however, chiefly with the Socialist Labor group that I am here concerned. This group is singled out because, during the two years and four months of Campbell-Bannerman's premiership, its strength was increased from twenty-nine to thirty-two, and it came to be regarded, in and out of Parliament, as the embodiment of the new independent and aggressive Labor movement in British politics.

From the first there were cordial relations and a working agreement between the Trade Union group and the Socialist

[1] Edward Porritt, "Party Conditions in England." POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY, June, 1906, XXI, 206–236.

Labor group. The conditions of the agreement were that the two groups should act together on labor questions, should meet monthly to consider the basis of common action in Parliament, and should not oppose each other's candidates at elections.[1] At one time there were expectations that the two groups would join forces and work as one organization in the House of Commons. But from 1906 to the end of the Campbell-Bannerman administration in April, 1908, the Socialist group was the only one of the Labor groups that followed the long-standing precedent of the Irish Nationalists and permanently established itself on the benches below the gangway on the opposition side of the chamber. From the beginning of the Parliament of 1906 the Socialists have had their own House of Commons organization. It is patterned on that of the Nationalists. Keir Hardie was at the head of the Independent Labor movement from its beginning in 1899 until the end of the session of 1907. At the beginning of the session of 1908 he retired from the parliamentary chairmanship, owing to ill-health, and was succeeded by Arthur Henderson, a moulder by trade, who has represented the Barnard Castle division of the county of Durham since 1903. The group has its own secretary and its own whips; and, unlike the members of the Liberal Labor group, its members do not go into council with the Liberals and do not receive government whips. In and out of Parliament they act as an independent party; so much so that, on thirteen or fourteen occasions since the general election of 1906, they have opposed Liberal candidates at by-elections, either carrying the contested seat for their candidate, throwing it into the possession of the Conservatives, or reducing the majority of the government candidate.

Socialist Labor attitude towards the House of Commons

There have been Labor members of the House of Commons since 1874. In the short-lived Parliament that was dissolved on the Home Rule bill—the Parliament elected in 1885, after the extension of the franchise to the working classes in non-

[1] *Cf.* Report of Conference, Independent Labor Party, at Hull, April 21, 1908.

parliamentary boroughs—the number of these Liberal Labor representatives went up to ten, and in the Parliament that was elected in 1892 there were sixteen; but until 1906 there had never been a large group of Labor representatives independent of both the two historic political parties. During the session of 1906 there was consequently keen interest in the attitude of the Socialist Labor group towards the House of Commons itself, and also towards the Liberal party and the government. With some politicians this interest was sympathetic and friendly. With others there was a hope that the Socialist group would adopt tactics similar to those brought into play by the Nationalists between 1878 and 1886, especially in the early years of Parnell's leadership, when Biggar was closely associated with Parnell in the parliamentary struggle of the Nationalists. There was an expectation that the aggressive spirit of the Socialists would impel them to make themselves a nuisance in the House; that they would disregard its traditions, adopt tactics that would jar on the Commons and on the country, and thereby bring discredit on the new labor movement.

These expectations were not realized. Although not more than three or four members of the Socialist group had been of the House before 1906, the group, as a whole, adapted itself at once to House of Commons ways and usages, and its members were quick to master the rules of procedure. In the sessions of 1906 and 1907 there was no obstruction by the Labor men. There was no undue eagerness on the part of any members of the Socialist group to attain prominence in the House and country by frequent intervention in debate. The discipline of the group would have checked any such tendency had it appeared; for it is the rule that the one or two members most practically conversant with a subject shall be deputed to express the views of the group. The specialization thus brought about and the moderation exercised by the group, as regards intrusion on the time and attention of the House, have so far answered well. The chosen representatives of the group have secured the ear of the House and the attention of the government; and, moreover, this policy of the careful selection of speakers has tended to fuller reporting of their speeches in the daily news-

papers than would have been the case if no such discipline had been exercised, with a resulting gain to the Socialist propaganda in the constituencies. Neither in England nor in Scotland is there a daily newspaper that gives editorial support to the Socialist Labor movement. The only newspapers of the party are the *Labour Leader* and the *Clarion*, both published weekly, and a few weekly propaganda journals which have only local circulations. But the growing strength of the movement in and out of Parliament makes the reporting of the speeches of the Labor members in the House of Commons incumbent on those London and provincial newspapers which still aim to give full and complete records of political thought and movement.

As regards the position in the House of Commons which the Socialist Labor group has made for itself by these methods there is no lack of testimony. "Most of the Labour members," wrote the parliamentary correspondent of the *British Weekly*, before the session of 1906 had come to an end, "are liked by the House. They are frank and obliging, and have remarkably little rancour. At first some of them were inclined to be noisy in their interruptions; but they have since adopted the parliamentary tone."[1] Within a few days after this commendation appeared in the *British Weekly*, one of the ministerial whips—A. O. Murray, the Master of Elibank—also paid a tribute to the Socialist group, then led by Keir Hardie.

> They were [he said] able, clever men, and great parliamentarians. They worked together; they were assiduous in their duties; they had studied economic questions; they knew what they wanted; and they were men who, however he might disagree with their opinions, had earned respect in the House of Commons because their conduct in that chamber had been in accordance with the highest and best parliamentary traditions.[2]

In the early days of the session of 1907 the parliamentary correspondent of the *Tribune* wrote:

> The discipline of the Labour party is wonderful. They reserve their activities for matters on which they can speak with authority, and the

[1] *British Weekly*, August 9, 1906. [2] *Tribune*, London, August 27, 1906.

oversight of every section of the political field which concerns them is deputed to the member who knows most about it. In a word they choose their own foremen. Added to all this, they have shown a fine facility for adapting themselves to the traditions of the House. They have a wise regard for its habits; they do not presume on their success; they even, occasionally, restrain their inclination to interrupt speakers who attack them. They reap their reward in the esteem of a House, which is gentlemanly in all its instincts, and infinitely prefers a labourer in earnest to a lord with affectations.[1]

None of these tributes to the place which the Socialist Labor group has made for itself in Parliament is from men or newspapers in sympathy with the movement. They are all from men who are of the Liberal party—men who fear that in the constituencies the Socialist Labor group will continue to draw electoral support which, in the absence of an independent progressive party, would be thrown to Liberal candidates.

Attitude towards the Campbell-Bannerman government

The attitude of the Socialist group towards the Campbell-Bannerman government can be judged from the utterances of the members of the group, but best of all from its aggressive action at the by-elections. In the House of Commons the party followed the line of policy which was decided upon when its leaders were busy with their preparations for the general election of 1906. One of its foremost members then declared that the attitude of the party to a Liberal government would be

one of independent though friendly coöperation, not generally, but on every occasion on which the Government was promoting legislation acceptable to the Labour party. On the other hand no consideration for the fate or fortune of the Government would prevent the Labour party from opposing to the extent of its power any proposal of the Government which was not acceptable to it.[2]

Midway through the session of 1906, by which time the Socialists were opposing Liberal candidates at by-elections,

[1] *Tribune*, London, March 25, 1907.

[2] "The Labour Party and the General Election." *The Independent Review*, August, 1905.

another member of the party restated its position towards the government.

> The Labour party would not throw out the Government because they did not introduce measures to suit them—they would try to improve the measures. The Labour party was a separate party in the House, and the Government knew that their position in the House was to watch them and to improve their measures.[1]

On other questions than those directly affecting labor the group took a line of its own. In the session of 1906, it went into the division lobby against the government and carried with it a number of Radical members who sit on the government benches, but who at times act with the Labor groups. This division was on a motion by Keir Hardie, to put the salary of the secretary of state for India upon the estimates, so as to give the House of Commons more control over Indian affairs. The Radicals who had voted with the Labor men were admonished by the Liberal whips; and again in the session of 1906, after a number of Liberal and Radical members had gone into the opposition lobby with the Labor men on their Trades Disputes bill, they were told by the whips that the attention of the Liberal associations in their constituencies would be called to their desertion of the government.[2] In the session of 1907 one of the most important measures not directly connected with labor was the bill of R. B. Haldane, secretary of state for war, abolishing the old organization of the auxiliary forces—the militia, the yeomanry and the volunteers—and reorganizing them into what are now known as the territorial forces. The government had little aid from the Socialist Labor group in the legislation necessary to this reorganization. The attitude of the group was defined by its parliamentary committee, at the conference of the Independent Labor party, held at Derby, on April 3, 1907. The Territorial Forces bill, the committee affirmed,

> makes the volunteer a soldier who lives at home instead of in barracks.

[1] D. J. Shackleton, at Higham, Clitheroe, October 12, 1906.

[2] *Cf.* speech by Keir Hardie, at Ardrossan. *Tribune*, London, September 17, 1906.

It extends the scope of military law. It hands over the rank of officer to the wealthy classes. It incorporates school corps and other brigades of children into the territorial army; and it makes the conditions of the service in these volunteer forces so arduous as to render it highly improbable that there will be a sufficient response on the part of the rank and file. Conscription will then stare us in the face.

At the same conference the parliamentary committee reported on the attitude of the Labor group towards the administrative departments of state and towards the civil service.

Our short experience has been sufficient to teach us that it is as important to democratize our administrative departments as it is to democratize our statute book. We have found that the doors to the higher offices in Whitehall are closed to every one who has not had a middle-class or an aristocratic education; and recent changes have placed our civil service more completely in the hands of the wealthy classes. Promotion in the navy, the organization of secondary education, the appointment of mine and factory inspectors have become less democratic than they have been, and the Labor party, almost unaided, has undertaken to stop this downward process. Democratic laws administered by permanent officials prejudiced against them are not likely to produce the results which you and we desire.

Opposition to Liberal candidates at by-elections

In the two years and four months that intervened between the general election of 1906 and the reorganization of the cabinet in April, 1908, there were thirty-eight contested by-elections, At fourteen of these there were three-cornered fights, due to the intervention of Socialist Labor candidates, or of Socialist candidates who, at the time of the election, were not associated with the Independent Labor party. All but three or four of these candidates were, however, of the Socialist Labor party, and had the support of the Independent Labor or Socialist group in the House of Commons.

The first of these three-cornered contests occurred when the first session of the Parliament of 1906 was not two months old. On March 12, 1906, there was an election for the Basingstoke division of Hampshire, at which the poll for the successful Conservative candidate was less than the total poll of the Liberal

and Labor candidates. The vacancy was due to the death of a Conservative member, so that the election did not result in the loss of a seat to the government. The next of these contests was in the Cockermouth division of Cumberland. There the vacancy was due to the death of Wilfrid Lawson, who had been a Liberal member of the House of Commons since 1859. The constituency is partly industrial, as many of the electors are employed in mining and at iron works. The Labor group set up a claim to the seat. In opposition to the government candidate, the son of a peer whose wealth had been accumulated in the iron industry of South Wales, the Labor party nominated a trade-union leader. By their action they enabled the Conservatives to win the seat easily, thus inflicting on the Campbell-Bannerman government its first reverse at the by-elections. Four months later, in November, 1906, there was a vacancy at Huddersfield, owing to the fact that the Liberal member had accepted a permanent government appointment. Again the Labor party nominated a candidate, and the government candidate carried the seat by a majority of only 340 votes. The successful candidate polled 5762 votes; the Labor candidate came next with 5422; and 4844 votes were given to the Conservative candidate, who, with Cockermouth in mind, had been confident that he would carry the seat. Early in 1907 a by-election was rendered necessary by the appointment as ambassador at Washington of James Bryce, who had sat for many years for one of the divisions of the city of Aberdeen. At this election, in February, 1907, the government candidate had to meet the opposition of a Socialist candidate not attached to the Independent Labor party, who polled 1740 votes, as compared with 3779 for the Liberal candidate and 3412 for his Conservative opponent.

The first loss of a Liberal seat to the Labor men came in July, 1907, when the government candidate at Jarrow was defeated by Pete Curran, a member of the Socialist Labor party. There were four candidates for a seat which had been held by a supporter of the government. The Labor candidate polled 4698 votes; the Conservative, 3930; the Liberal, 3474; and the Irish Nationalist candidate, 2124. Jarrow was described

by the newspapers supporting the government as a surprise. Two weeks later, in the Colne Valley division of Yorkshire, there came what the Liberal newspapers described as a "galvanic shock."[1] The vacancy there was due to the bestowal of a peerage on a wealthy Liberal member of the manufacturing class—an honor which would probably have been postponed had the government whips had any idea that the failure of the Liberals at Cockermouth and Jarrow would be repeated. The local organization of the Socialist party in the Colne Valley, acting independently of the Labor party of the House of Commons, nominated Victor Grayson, an unattached Socialist, who was elected by a majority of 153 over Philip Bright, a son of John Bright. The vote for Grayson was 3648; for Bright, 3495; and Wheeler, the Conservative candidate, polled 3227 votes.

Jarrow and Colne Valley were the complete electoral successes of the Labor and Socialist movement during the existence of the Campbell-Bannerman government. These elections increased the number of Independent Labor and Socialist members in the House of Commons from twenty-nine to thirty-one; and the number was further increased to thirty-two by the action of the Durham Miners' Union. At the general election John Johnson, who has been an agent of the Durham miners since 1890, was elected at Gateshead as a Liberal Labor member. He had the support of the Liberal party in the constituency, and during the first session of the new Parliament he was one of the Liberal Labor group which sits on the government side of the House and acts generally with the government and the Liberal party. Johnson's parliamentary salary, however, came out of the funds of the Durham Miners' Union, and it was on instruction from his union that Johnson transferred himself from the government benches and joined the Independent Labor group on the opposition side of the chamber.

Encouraged by these successes in the constituencies, by the consternation which Jarrow and Colne Valley had created in the Liberal party and by the attention which their wide and

[1] *The Nation*, August 24, 1907.

persistent propaganda was attracting from both the old political parties, the Independent Labor party threw even more vigor into their electoral activities. In September there was a vacancy in the Kirkdale division of Liverpool. Since the Reform Act of 1832 Liverpool has been the most consistently Conservative city in England; and the Kirkdale division, like most of the nine divisions of Liverpool, has long been represented by a Conservative. At the general election in 1906 the Liberals did not nominate a candidate. There was then a Labor candidate, who polled 3157 votes to 3749 votes polled by the successful Conservative candidate. In September, 1907, the Liberals again allowed the election to go by default. The Labor group, however, persisted in their attentions to the constituency; and after one of the most remarkable parliamentary contests of recent times—a contest in which the curb-stone methods of propaganda of the Labor party were frankly adopted by their antagonists—the Conservatives again carried the seat. Their candidate polled 4000 votes. The Labor candidate's poll was 3330, an increase of 173 on the vote for the Labor candidate at the general election in 1906.

Kirkdale is the only constituency in which, since the general election, Labor or Socialist candidates have had only a Conservative candidate to fight. The next contest—that at West Hull, in November, 1907—was of the usual three-cornered character. The vacancy was caused by the succession of the Liberal member to a recently created peerage. A brother of the new peer, a member of a family long identified with the shipping activity of Hull, was the Liberal candidate. He carried the seat against both Labor and Conservative opposition. Hull had not been before 1907 the scene of an election in which the new Labor party was concerned; although in 1895 there was a Labor candidate, not associated with any national organization, who polled 1400 votes in a contest with a Liberal candidate. In 1907 there were three candidates. The successful Liberal polled 5623 votes; the Conservative, 5382; and the Socialist Labor candidate, 4512. One significant element in the large vote for the Labor candidate at West Hull was the support accorded him by electors who usually vote with the Con-

servative party. Upon this fact the *Yorkshire Post*, the most important Conservative daily newspaper in provincial England, commented as follows:

> Unionists will be glad that the Labour candidate has not given the country a repetition of Jarrow or Colne Valley. But the progress made by his party points clearly to the central feature of British politics now and at the next election—in all likelihood for much further ahead. Perhaps the worst feature of this West Hull accession to the Labour party is the fact that apparently Mr. Holmes has taken a number of votes from the Conservative party. At the general election the total of votes polled was 15,057; yesterday it was 15,517. There must, of course, have been changes, so that no exact handling of the figures for purposes of deduction is possible; but if Mr. Holmes, as is probable, has attracted the 2029 votes by which Mr. Guy Wilson has failed to reach his brother's poll at the general election, it would seem also that 1023 Unionist votes polled by Sir John Sherburn, two years ago, have now gone to Labour.[1]

In 1908 the government lost seats in Mid-Devon and in Peckham; but there was no active intervention of the Labor party in either of these constituencies. In South Leeds, in February, 1908, the Labor group ran a candidate against the government candidate. In a three-cornered contest the seat was retained by the government, whose candidate polled 5274 votes, as compared with 4915 votes for the Conservative candidate and 2451 for the candidate of the Socialist Labor party.

There was a miniature general election in April and May, 1908, consequent on Campbell–Bannerman's retirement and the reorganization of the administration. John Morley, Henry Fowler and Edmund Robertson went to the House of Lords—a promotion which necessitated by-elections at Wolverhampton, at Dundee and in the Montrose Burghs. The acceptance by Churchill and Runciman of new offices in the ministry led to by-elections in Northwest Manchester and Dewsbury. There was also a by-election at Stirling, the constituency which Campbell–Bannerman had represented in the House of Commons for forty years. Wolverhampton and Stirling were the

[1] *Yorkshire Post*, Leeds, November 30, 1907.

only constituencies in which the government candidates had not to encounter the opposition of the Socialists. At Dewsbury Runciman was opposed by a candidate of the Socialist Labor group as well as by a Conservative. The newly-appointed president of the Board of Education carried the election, polling 5594 votes, as compared with 6764 polled by him in the same constituency at the general election. The poll of the Socialist Labor candidate was 2446, as compared with 2629 in 1906. The vote for the unsuccessful Conservative candidate was 4078, as compared with 2959 at the general election. Northwest Manchester, the constituency represented by Churchill while he was under-secretary of state for the colonies in the Campbell–Bannerman administration, was represented by a Conservative from 1885 to 1906. In May, 1908, when Churchill sought re-election there after his appointment as president of the Local Government Board, he was opposed by a Conservative and tariff-reform candidate and also by a candidate of the Social Democratic Federation—an organization which came into existence twenty-eight years ago, which has fought numerous parliamentary contests, but which so far has not succeeded in electing one of its candidates to the House of Commons. At an election in which 10,691 voters went to the poll, the Social Democratic candidate received only 276 votes. Assuming that all these votes would, in the absence of a Socialist candidate, have gone to Churchill, they would not have saved the seat for him; for the successful Conservative candidate polled 5417 votes, as compared with Churchill's poll of 4988. It was the government's education policy and Asquith's drastic licensing bill that brought about Churchill's defeat. The Catholic vote was thrown to the Conservative candidate; and every brewhouse in Manchester and every liquor shop in the constituency was a center of Conservative activity. After his defeat at Manchester, Churchill went to Dundee. There a contest awaited him similar to that of Runciman, his ministerial colleague, at Dewsbury. Dundee has two representatives. At the general election one of the seats went to Robertson, who was parliamentary secretary to the Admiralty in the Campbell–Bannerman government, and the other to

Alexander Wilkie, of the Boiler Makers' Union, who is of the Socialist Labor group in the House of Commons. When Robertson's seat was vacated, the Socialists attempted to secure this also; but their candidate, Stuart, polled only 655 votes. Churchill's poll was 7079; and for the Conservative candidate, a Dundee manufacturer, the poll was 4014.

Stuart's platform at Dundee was typical of the platforms of the Socialist Labor party's candidates at this series of by-elections. In the forefront of his appeal to the constituency Stuart put the question of unemployment. He complained that the Unemployed Workmen's bill introduced in the session of 1908 by the Labor group—what has come to be known as the "Right to Work" bill—was unfairly treated by the Campbell-Bannerman government when it was defeated at second-reading stage, on March 13, by 265 votes to 116. Stuart pledged himself, if elected, to support the reintroduction of the bill or the introduction of some other measure based on the right to work and on the duty of the state to see that none of its subjects shall suffer from starvation. Non-contributory old-age pensions and a universal eight-hour day were put forward as remedies for poverty and as a check upon emigration. Stuart, like all the members of the Socialist Labor group, was opposed to tariff reform and protection. As to the liquor question, which at that time was in the forefront in English constituencies, he held that the trade should be controlled by the people. Education, he contended, should be free in all grades; and there should be free meals for the school children who required them, the cost of the meals to be an imperial charge and not, as at present under the Free Meals Act of 1906, a charge on the municipalities. Other planks in Stuart's platform were better housing for the working classes, the taxation of land values (a subject of much present interest in Scotland), home rule for Ireland, adult suffrage and international arbitration.[1] On this platform Stuart polled but 665 votes, as compared with 6833 for Wilkie at the general election. But in 1906 the Socialist Labor candidate had the support of the Dundee

[1] *Cf. Glasgow Herald*, May 1, 1908.

Liberals, whereas in 1908 Stuart was attempting to bring about the defeat of a member of the Liberal cabinet.

The seat for the Montrose Burghs, which John Morley held from 1896, when he failed of re-election at Newcastle, went at the by-election to Robert Vernon Harcourt, son of the late William Harcourt. For the successful Liberal candidate there were 3083 votes; for the Socialist Labor candidate, 1937; and for the Conservative candidate, 1576. The total poll was larger than in 1906. As at West Hull, the Socialist Labor candidate drew his support from electors who had hitherto voted with the Conservatives, as well as from Morley's former supporters; for Harcourt polled some 330 votes less than were polled for Morley, and there were 346 fewer votes for the Conservative candidate in 1908 than at the general election in 1906. It was this turn-over from both the Liberal and Conservative candidates and the new electoral strength, which obviously went to the Socialist candidate, that gave him a vote of nearly two thousand at an election in which 6596 voters exercised the franchise.

The by-elections in England in the early months of 1908 produced unmistakable signs of a reaction against the Liberal government. This was the case at Hastings, Peckham and Wolverhampton, where there were no three-cornered contests, the Socialists not putting up candidates. But in the early days of the Asquith administration there were no such evidences of reaction in Scotland. What may be described as the two progressive parties—the Liberal and the Socialist Labor—developed increased strength at these by-elections; and at Stirling the seat so long held by Campbell-Bannerman was retained by a supporter of the Asquith administration.

Strength of parties at the incoming of the Asquith government

After the by-elections following the incoming of the Asquith government, there were in the House of Commons thirty-two Independent Labor members, and there were still, as in 1906, fourteen Trade Union members and fourteen Liberal Labor members. Henry Broadhurst, who began life as a stone-mason, who was secretary of the parliamentary committee of the Trade

Union Congress from 1875 to 1890, and who was of the Liberal Labor group in the House of Commons from 1880, retired from the representation of Leicester in March, 1906. At the general election two months earlier, the Socialist Labor candidate, Ramsay Macdonald, had carried the second seat at Leicester; but when Broadhurst retired the Socialists made no effort, as later at Dundee, to obtain both seats, and a Liberal candidate was permitted to make a straight old-line party fight against the Conservative. He was successful; and by this change in the representation of Leicester the Liberal Labor group in the House of Commons was reduced to thirteen. It was further reduced to twelve by the defection of the miners' representative from Gateshead; but between 1906 and the formation of the Asquith government in April, 1908, Liberal members who had died were succeeded in Northwest Staffordshire and Northeast Derbyshire—both mining constituencies—by Miners' Union representatives. By these elections the losses at Leicester and Gateshead, so far as they affected the Liberal Labor group, were made good, and the strength of the group was maintained at fourteen.

The government majority, when the newly elected House of Commons assembled for the first time, was 242, not including the 29 Socialist Labor members or the 83 Nationalists. Before the session of 1906 was a month old two members elected as Conservatives threw in their lot with the Liberals, bringing the majority of the government up to 244. This number has since been reduced by three, as a result of the gains made by the Socialist Labor party; and between the by-election at Cockermouth in August, 1906, at which the government sustained its first loss, and the by-election at Stirling in May, 1908, six seats were wrested from the government by the Conservatives. The Asquith ministry started on its career with a majority on the government benches of 231, not including the 31 Socialist Labor members or the 83 Irish Nationalists. Four of the nine losses to the Liberal party between the general election in 1906 and May, 1908, are directly traceable to the action of the Socialist Labor party, one of these—that at Cockermouth—resulting in an increase in the strength of the Conservative

party. The number of seats gained by the Conservatives, in the two years and four months over which the Parliament of 1906 had extended at the time of the reorganization of the Liberal government, were much less than the aggregate electoral losses of the party in power in a corresponding period in any previous Parliament.

Socialist Labor propaganda and Liberal alarm

The electoral activities of the Socialist Labor party are, after all, only part of a more continuous and wider propaganda carried on in most of the industrial constituencies of England and Scotland. The Labor party is always at work; and its propaganda methods are more akin to those of the Salvation Army than to those of the two older political parties in educating the electorate as to the principles and measures for which the parties stand. Unlike the two older parties, the Labor party has no daily press which in season and out of season is pushing its propaganda. This lack and the complete dependence on the efforts of its own adherents were realized from the outset. It was realized that the conventional methods of the older parties promised no great success for the new movement, and the curbstone was early adopted as the rostrum of the Socialist Labor party.

The unprecedented success of the party at the general election in 1906 was largely due to this curbstone propaganda and to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers, missionaries whose enthusiasm for the new cause, greater than the enthusiasm of many religious teachers for their faith, impells them to follow the methods of the Salvation Army and to make known the faith that is in them wherever half a dozen passers-by will halt under the glow of a street-lamp. Halls are used for public meetings whenever and wherever the funds of a local organization of the Socialist Labor party will admit of such luxury. Where funds are not available, meetings are held at street corners, in the public squares, in the market places or in the parks. Every week, summer or winter, some two thousand five hundred of these meetings are held.[1] They are so numer-

[1] Interview with Keir Hardie. *Globe*, Toronto, July 22, 1907.

ous that reporters are complaining of the new burden which the propaganda is throwing upon them;[1] for with thirty-one Socialist Labor members in the House of Commons it has ceased to be practicable for the newspapers to ignore the local meetings of the party that has returned these members to Parliament.

Among the adherents of both the older parties there was an expectation, perhaps a hope, that there would be an easing-down in the Socialist Labor propaganda after the success that the movement had achieved at the general election. The propaganda, however, went on as before. One description of the methods by which it is pushed will serve to illustrate the activities of the party in the larger cities, where members are numerous, where organization is good, where funds are available for the hire of halls, where speakers of more than local fame can be secured and large audiences can be assured to them. The description quoted is of the activities of the party in Edinburgh, and is taken from the news columns of the *Glasgow Herald*, which is editorially as much opposed to the new movement as is the Liberty and Property Defence League or the Primrose League.

Under the auspices of the Independent Labor party most of the large Sunday meetings are promoted, at which the speakers are prominent social reformers. On a recent Sunday the Right Hon. Sir John Gorst delivered an address to a large gathering. The syllabus of lectures and debates prepared for this winter session provides a somewhat solid feast of reason for the members of the branch. At the end of this month Mr. Victor Grayson, M. P., will speak on the Destiny of the Mob; while Messrs. J. A. Seddon, J. Ramsay Macdonald, Pete Curran, Geo. H. Roberts, Philip Snowden and F. W. Jowett, all members of Parliament, and two Edinburgh clergymen (Congregational and Church of Scotland) are also numbered among the lecturers. A prospect is held out that an arrangement may also be made with the Rev. R. J. Campbell for an address. At the more important meetings a variety is given to the proceedings by the new Edinburgh Clarion Choir, which meets weekly for the practice of Socialist melodies. Another feature of the propaganda in the capital is the Socialist and

[1] *Newspaper Owner*, October 12, 1907.

Ethical Sunday School, conducted weekly in the Central Rooms in the Lawnmarket, where the catechism taught is not that of the Westminster divines.[1]

There was no halt to the activities of the Socialist Labor party after the general election. Its exertions, however, attracted less public attention than in the winter months of 1905–06, when all the political parties were lining up for the great struggle in the constituencies. Consequently the Liberal party, in and out of Parliament, experienced a shock when, at the end of the summer of 1906, it was realized that the Socialist Labor group, as part of its propaganda and with the view also of adding to its parliamentary strength, had persisted in nominating a candidate at Cockermouth, and had thereby thrown the seat long held by Wilfrid Lawson into the possession of the Conservatives.

The Master of Elibank, comptroller of the king's household and one of the Scotch Liberal whips in the House of Commons, was the first member of the Campbell-Bannerman ministry to express his alarm at the impending danger to the Liberal party. In a speech at West Linton, a few days after the defeat of the government candidate at Cockermouth, he said:

Liberalism never thrived upon socialism. Liberals did not believe in the public ownership of the means of production, nor that necessarily capital and labour were antagonistic. They did not believe that it was the right of every man to obtain labour from the state, or that it was the duty of the state to give labour where there was not a demand for it. He knew that, as Scottish whip, he spoke with a certain authority attaching to that position. But as one coming in contact daily with stern and strong workers in the Liberal party of the working classes and of the rank and file of the Liberal party in the House of Commons, he was conscious that there was a growing feeling, which had been accentuated by the Cockermouth election, that unless the Liberal party stood upon its own legs its very vitals would be consumed. It would fall between two stools, and disappear as an active force in British politics.[2]

There were many replies from the Socialist Labor party to

[1] *Glasgow Herald*, October 15, 1907. [2] *Tribune*, London, August 27, 1906.

these utterances of the Master of Elibank. One from each of the two Socialist newspapers may be taken as indicating their nature. In the *Labour Leader* Keir Hardie, then parliamentary chairman of the group, wrote:

It is to the Cockermouth election that we owe this enlightening burst of frankness. The Scottish Liberal whip is not the only member of the party who is thinking these things; others who think them, and feel them quite as strongly as he, are too discreet to give them tongue in the presence of reporters. In the very nature of things this feeling is bound to grow. Cockermouth is but the first of long series of contests in which Labour will be in conflict with both Liberals and Conservatives. Labour must go on fighting for its own hand, careless of whether its enemy wear one or two heads. For all who oppose Labour candidates are the enemies of Labour, whether they are known as Liberal or as Conservative.[1]

F. W. Jowett, another member of the parliamentary group, wrote in the *Clarion*:

If there had been no Labour candidate at Cockermouth, it would have been merely a society struggle. And even had there been more in the nature of political differences between the orthodox rival candidates than there actually was, we must increase our numbers. We have no intention of remaining a party of thirty if we can help it. Consequently we must fight by-elections.[2]

The Conservative counter-propaganda

For several months the Conservative party regarded these acute differences between the government and the Socialist Labor party with satisfaction. They would have welcomed an endless series of Cockermouths had it resulted in the handing over to them of what had long been regarded as Liberal seats. But when, as at Jarrow and in the Colne Valley, the Socialist candidates carried elections against both Conservative and Liberal candidates, and when after Kirkdale it began to be realized that men who had formerly voted with the Conservatives were voting for Socialist Labor candidates, the Conservatives in their turn became alarmed. Numerous organizations directly or

[1] *Labour Leader*, August 31, 1906. [2] *Clarion*, August 31, 1906.

indirectly concerned in the upholding of Tory principles now bestirred themselves to set on foot a counter-propaganda.

The Primrose League, founded in 1883 by Churchill, Wolff and Gorst on the model of the Orange Society, to infuse new life into the Tory party in the constituencies and to form "a new political society, which should embrace all classes and all creeds except atheists and enemies of the British nation,"[1] was first in the field and raised a special fund for a propaganda against socialism. Its speakers were sent out to preach that "the methods of socialism are fraught with inexpressible danger to religion and to civilization itself," and "to show the elector the falsity of the tirades which the socialist and the political agitator are preaching."[2] The Liberty and Property Defence League, founded twenty-five years ago, next pushed into the field. It was prepared to send its lecturers anywhere in the kingdom to prove "that socialism is economically fallacious, politically mischievous and morally unsound."[3] As one outcome of this activity, two hundred delegates from local associations with kindred aims to those of the Liberty and Property Defence League assembled in conference in October, at Caxton Hall, Westminster, on methods to be adopted to stay the socialist movement.

After the Caxton Hall conference, the National Union of Constitutional and Conservative Associations became so deeply impressed with the new danger to Toryism and to society in general that in mid-December, when English winter weather is at its worst, it started four itinerant vans on a tour of England and Wales. Speakers charged with the duty of combating socialism at the cross-roads or on the village greens, or anywhere in rural England where they could find a pull-up for their vans and an audience willing to listen to them, traveled and lodged in these vans. The vans were sent out in response to the hurry call after Jarrow and the general alarm after Colne Valley and Kirkdale. This campaign, in which the Conservatives adopted methods of propaganda first employed by the

[1] Winston Spencer Churchill, Lord Randolph Churchill, I, 256.

[2] *Yorkshire Post*, July 25, 1907. [3] *Ibid.*, July 27, 1907.

land-law reformers in the early eighties, when Chamberlain and Jesse Collings were still of the advanced wing of the Radical party, was continued all through the winter months of 1907–08. Rain or snow, the vans pushed on from village to village, and audiences were found or made for the National Union lecturers. By March 7, 1908, it was reported from headquarters in London that the vans had traveled 13,600 miles; that 8160 villages and hamlets had been visited; that missionary work by the lecturers, and by means of megaphone messages from Balfour and other Tory leaders, had been done in 2785 villages; and that 760,000 people had attended the meetings.[1]

Every Conservative member of Parliament who addressed his constituents in the 1907–08 recess felt it incumbent on him to take his part in the counter-movement against socialism. So did numerous members of the House of Lords; and so did many Liberal members, including men in the front rank of the party, such as Asquith and Haldane. In the winter of 1907–08 the pros and cons of socialism were more continuously and persistently discussed in public and in private than any other political subject. The controversy over the House of Lords was quite submerged in the new and widespread interest in socialism. The education controversy was similarly eclipsed; and it was not until April 17, 1908, when Asquith introduced his bill for reforming the licensing laws, that ordinary political questions regained possession of the public mind.

It is necessary to go back to the period that lies between the French Revolution and the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo to recall an era in English political history that compares with the exciting winter of 1907–08. In the early days of that reactionary period, people in England were divided into two distinct schools of political thought. In one were the advocates of parliamentary reform—those who were not shocked beyond the reasoning point by the French Revolution. In the other were those who supported the Tory government, who viewed the Revolution with inexpressible horror, and who regarded the advocates of reform much as they regarded Robespierre and

[1] *Daily Mail*, Manchester, March 14, 1908.

Marat. At that time the advocates of reform were denounced, like the socialists of to-day, as levelers and atheists. Much bitterness was infused into the attack on the socialists, in the winter of 1907–08, by such denunciations—by accusations that they were atheists and were bent on the uprooting and destruction of the family. This attack was pushed so far and so relentlessly that in January, 1908, one hundred clergymen of the established and free churches, who are organized in the Christian Socialist movement, published a manifesto, in which they said:

We declare that the Socialism we believe in, sometimes called Christian Socialism, involves the public ownership and management of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and is therefore essentially the same Socialism as that which is held by Socialists throughout the world. Our Socialism is not less earnest nor less complete because it is inspired by Christianity. The central teaching of Socialism is a matter of economics, and may therefore be advocated by all men, whether they be Christians or unbelievers; yet we feel, as ministers of the Christian faith, that this economic doctrine is in perfect harmony with our faith, and we believe that its advocacy is sanctioned and indeed required of us by the implications of our religion.[1]

At the end of the winter campaign the Socialist Labor party, like the National Union of Conservative Associations, published its estimate of the season's work. It claimed gains not only from its own propaganda but from the counter-propaganda.

The Tory party has constituted itself the champion against Socialism. The Liberal party, though not officially taking part in the campaign, and although many Liberal politicians and newspapers have either held entirely aloof or expressly dissociated themselves from it, has nevertheless in parliamentary contests and in local politics joined bitterly and unscrupulously in the attack upon Socialism. All of this has been a great gain to our cause, and made the year memorable in the history of British Socialism.[2]

[1] *Daily News*, January 20, 1908.

[2] Report submitted to the conference of the Independent Labor party, at Hudders field, in April.

Labor legislation

The more important legislative successes of the labor movement came in the session of 1906. In that session the Socialist Labor group impelled the government to accept the principle of a bill introduced by one of its members for safeguarding trade-union funds from judgments in the law courts like that in the Taff Vale case, which mulcted the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in heavy damages arising out of a strike on one of the railways in South Wales. Bills dealing with this subject were before the House of Commons of 1900–06. One was introduced in 1903; and in 1905 the second reading of such a bill was carried by a majority of 122. This measure, however, failed of final passage in the House of Commons for lack of time; and at the general election of 1906 trade-unionists all over the country sought pledges from candidates that they would support a bill amending the law as it had been laid down in the Taff Vale case.

The Campbell–Bannerman government was pledged to legislation to safeguard trade-union funds; and on March 28, 1906, Lawson Walton, the attorney-general, introduced a Trades Dispute bill of three clauses. The first two clauses defined and limited conspiracy and legalized peaceful picketing; the third clause provided that funds of trade unions could not be made liable for damages by reason of any action of a trade-union official, unless the action could be proved to have been authorized by the central body of the trade union.

On this last clause the Labor members promptly took issue with the government. Their position was that it had been the intention of Parliament, when it passed the Trade Union Act of 1871, absolutely to safeguard trade-union funds; that for thirty years it had been universally supposed that the funds were so safeguarded; that no one had suffered during that period from this supposed immunity; and that the legislation which the trade unions demanded would merely restore them to the position conceded to them before the House of Lords decision in the Taff Vale case. These objections were raised on the first reading of the attorney-general's bill; and before

that measure came up for second reading—the stage at which the principle of a bill is accepted or rejected—the House was called upon to vote on a bill introduced by William Hudson, Socialist Labor member for Newcastle-on-Tyne, which was also intended to safeguard trade-union funds. Hudson's bill went much further than the government bill. It gave to trade-union funds absolute immunity from any such liability as was asserted in the Taff Vale decision. The second reading of this bill was carried by a majority of 350, and the government had no option but to substitute the clause in the Hudson bill for the third clause in the attorney-general's bill.

In this form the bill went to the House of Lords. It had been strenuously opposed by the Conservatives in the House of Commons and vigorously denounced by the Conservative press. This opposition, which was by no means confined to the Conservative party, aroused an expectation that the House of Lords would assert itself and summarily reject the bill. It was December, 1906, before it came up for second reading in the Lords. Halsbury, who was lord chancellor in the Conservative administrations from 1895 to 1906, and who is one of the few surviving Tories of the Eldon school, characterized the trade-union funds protection clause as "the most disgraceful section that had ever appeared in an English statute" and denounced it as "absolutely contrary to the whole spirit of the English constitution." But the Conservative leaders did not regard it as good tactics, in the then impending controversy between the Liberal House of Commons and the Tory House of Lords, that the Lords should throw out the bill and thus become involved in a contest with the democracy in the constituencies. Landsdowne, the opposition leader in the Lords, accordingly announced that while the Conservatives disclaimed all responsibility for the bill they would not oppose its enactment. So the bill went on the statute book, where it stands as the greatest and most direct parliamentary achievement of the Labor movement in British politics—an act with a House of Commons history that will serve for years as a justification for the Independent Labor movement.

In the same session of Parliament there was passed an amending act to the Compensation to Workmen Act of 1897

(Chamberlain's act), which, it will be remembered, is based on the principle that the casualties of industry must be charges upon the industries in which they occur. The amending act brought clerks, shop assistants, seamen, postmen and domestic servants within the provisions of the law. It also removed some difficulties and anomalies which had been disclosed in the nine years' working of the original act.

Another measure which the Labor men in the House strongly supported was the Educational (Provision of Meals) Act. This is not a mandatory but a permissive act. Under its provisions a local educational authority, which is convinced that there are children attending the schools under its care who are in need of food and that voluntary effort to supply this need is insufficient, may provide meals and may lay a rate not exceeding one halfpenny in the pound on the assessed rental value of the property in the area subject to its jurisdiction.

In the same session (1906) one of the members of the Socialist Labor group introduced an amendment to the Aliens Act of 1905, to make it unlawful to import men to take the places of men who were out on strike. This measure was passed by the House of Commons only to be rejected when it came up for second reading in the House of Lords. In the session of 1907 Parliament passed an act bringing laundries within the scope of those of the Factory Acts which regulate the work of women and children. This was the only labor law adopted in 1907.

The enactments above summarized include most of the labor and social legislation which, up to the incoming of the Asquith government in May, 1908, had been enacted by the Parliament elected in 1906. But no adequate idea of the parliamentary activity of the Socialist Labor group is possible without some brief statement of the directions in which they have sought to push legislation, as shown by bills introduced by members of the group which were either defeated at second reading or failed to get even so far in their progress through the House of Commons.

In the session of 1906 William Crooks, a cooper by trade, introduced a bill providing that members of Parliament should

travel free on the railways when journeying to or from their homes or their constituencies and Westminster. Jowett introduced a bill to prohibit manufacturing in woollen, worsted and silk factories between noon on Saturday and six o'clock on Monday morning. The industries were thus defined because in the factory code there is already a law which prohibits women and children from working in cotton factories after noon on Saturdays. The proportion of women and children in these factories is so large that this law guarantees the stoppage of all work in the cotton factories at noon. In the other textile mills the proportion of women and children is much smaller—so much smaller that work can be continued after noon on Saturdays, after the women and children in these mills may have ceased work. Jowett's bill was defeated on the second reading. In the same session William C. Steadman, who is of the Liberal Labor group or, as it is sometimes called, "the Old Guard," introduced a bill for the establishment of fair-rent courts for working-class tenants; and in the session of 1908 Richard Bell, of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, also of the Liberal group, introduced a bill making it compulsory on employers to furnish a reference note to any person leaving their employ and requesting such a note.

The measure on which the Socialist group concentrated its energies in the session of 1908 was the "Right to Work" bill, which was introduced by W. T. Wilson, carpenter, who sits for the West Houghton division of Lancashire. This bill provided for the registration of unemployed labor and for the establishment, by order in council, of a central unemployment committee. It proposed to impose on municipal authorities the obligation to find work for every registered unemployed person within their areas or, in the alternative, to provide maintenance for the workmen and those dependent upon him, without disfranchising him. It was also proposed to confer power on local authorities to detain for a period of six months any unemployed person who refused to work.

Wilson was fortunate in the ballot for days for private members' bills. His measure came up for second reading on March 13. An urgent whip against the bill was sent to all the govern-

ment's regular supporters; and after a long discussion, in which there were some tart interchanges between John Burns and members of the Socialist Labor group, the motion for second reading was rejected by 265 votes to 116. Thirty Liberal members, including Masterman, who is now of the Asquith ministry, voted with the Labor men; so did such of the Irish Nationalists as were present, and also two members of the Conservative opposition.

Other results

To complete this survey of the parliamentary work and position of the Labor party, it only remains to add that, as the result of the general strength of the Labor movement in the House of Commons as represented by the three distinct groups of labor representatives, there have been many concessions to labor by the various government departments. Trade-union representatives of the postal and telegraph clerks were recognized by Buxton, the postmaster-general. Seamen and seagoing firemen have obtained the right to be represented before the local marine boards by the officials of their unions when charges of breach of discipline are preferred by captains against members of their crews. This concession was made by Lloyd George, when he was president of the Board of Trade. An eight-hours working day was established in the Admiralty dock yards in June, 1906; in December, 1906, wages in these establishments were increased; and, also in 1906, the wages of gardeners in the several parks in London and the vicinity that are under the control of the commissioner of public works were increased by three shillings a week. During the two years and four months over which the Campbell-Bannerman administration extended, an unusual number of royal commissions and select committees were appointed to investigate industrial and social conditions, and early in the session of 1906 the Socialist Labor group established its claim to representation in the make-up of these commissions and committees.

What the Socialist Labor party itself claims for its activity in and out of Parliament between the general election of 1906 and the beginning of the session of 1908 was set forth by Ramsay

Macdonald, its parliamentary secretary, on the eve of the new session.

The fact that progress has been made all around indicates why the party has existed at all. It has quickened the intelligence and the sense of self-respect amongst the wage earners of the country. It has been of inestimable value to the morale of the masses that a body of men, every one of whom sprung from the cottage and the industrial home, have been in the House of Commons for the past two years, and gaining by their practical capacity and native ability a conspicuous place in an assembly where, it had been assumed, only "the classes" could shine. The common man has been taught to hold up his head, and has been led to believe in that most valuable of all forms of self-help—self-help in the making of laws. Whilst Radicals have been talking of the forms of democracy, the Labour party has been awakening the spirit of democracy, with the result that democratic thought and democratic organisations have received new vitality.[1]

A look forward

As to the future of the party, my own conviction is that it will continue to gain in strength in the constituencies and in the House of Commons. At the end of the session of 1907, Liberal newspapers, while conceding that the party was "a real asset in the business of government," that "its influence in the House of Commons was towards purity and simplicity," that it included "individuals of repute and force" and that at least three of its members—Macdonald, Shackleton and Barnes—"might quite properly be included in a cabinet of advanced politicians," objected that the Socialist Labor party could not form a government—"that it could not sustain the foreign or domestic policy of the country."[2] Such a result is not within the contemplation of its middle-class supporters. The tens of thousands of electors who before 1906 voted with the Liberals and the thousands of electors who voted with the Conservatives, and who are to-day in sympathy with the Socialist Labor party, have no expectation that in the near future the group will be called upon to form an administration. They have no desire that its full

[1] *Daily News*, January 20, 1908. [2] *Nation*, London, November 30, 1907.

program shall be realized—that the state shall possess itself of the means of production, distribution and exchange. But they realize that there is much to be achieved short of the full program of the Socialists. To-day they are satisfied to give their support to the Socialist Labor party because it stands for some ideals of social justice and social betterment; because it is working towards these ideals; and moreover, and in particular, because in season and out of season the Socialist Labor party keeps the "condition of England question" to the front in the public mind.

The old "governing classes" theory, dominant between the Revolution of 1688 and the middle of Queen Victoria's reign—the theory that millions of electors are to march to the polls every five or six years merely to assist this or that group of the governing classes to form an administration and divide the ministerial offices—is nowadays losing its hold on the public mind. Opposition to the old theory became increasingly strong after the Reform Act of 1885; and it must increase in strength as the level of popular intelligence rises, and as nineteenth-century history and biography—especially political letters and biographies—are more widely read and more critically estimated.

Contemporaneously with the gradual relegation into the background of the theory of rule by the governing classes, it has been increasingly realized that, in the absence of any constantly impelling popular forces and movements, there is at bottom not much difference in the political aims and ideals of the Conservatives, of the Whigs, and of those orthodox Liberals who are scarcely distinguishable from Whigs. The difference is particularly small in the case of those wealthy Liberals of the mine-owning, ship-owning, manufacturing and commercial classes who are intent on social and territorial as well as political ambitions, who are anxious to "gentle their condition," and who put social ambition—a baronetcy or a peerage—as the goal of their political activities. All this has been brought home to the minds of the younger members of the Liberal party in the constituencies, especially in the great industrial constituencies, by the excessive creation of peers—twenty-eight in all—since the Liberals came into office at the end of 1905. It has been

brought home to them also by the artificiality and hollowness of the recent worse than abortive movement of the front-bench Liberals against the House of Lords; and again by the lack of courage and of persistence shown by the Liberal ministry in dealing with the education question. In the space of two years three Liberal cabinet ministers have tried their hand at a settlement of this question; and two of them have dropped a worse than half-completed task, with attendant loss of heart and demoralization for the rank and file of the party, when promotion in cabinet rank came within their reach.

Between the American Revolution and 1832, it was the custom of the House of Commons, at wide intervals, after bad harvests or during a period of industrial depression, to go into committee of the whole to consider the state of the nation—to discuss the condition of England. Today that question, presented in an infinitely more comprehensive form and viewed from a totally different standpoint, is being discussed outside Parliament with a persistence and continuousness without precedent in England's history. It is in the atmosphere of English life. It is not discussed on party lines; and its discussion tends increasingly to the dissolution of the cement which has in the past served to hold people to the one or the other of the old-line political parties. So long as this discussion of the condition of England goes on, and so long as the question continues to be faced in the spirit of this new awakening of the social conscience, any party in the House of Commons which can be made to serve as a propelling force behind either the Tory or the Liberal party must continue to gain strength in the constituencies and to increase its admitted and obvious national usefulness at Westminster.

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