

The New British Labor Party's Programme

AN AMAZING DOCUMENT

IN a volume published by B. W. Huebsch, of this city, "The Aims of Labor," by Arthur Henderson, M.P., is printed the "Memorandum on War Aims" of the Inter-Allied Labor and Socialist Conference which met in London, and the report of the sub-committee on "Labor and the New Social Order." It is well to have the two documents presented with what is practically an introduction and explanation of the new programme by Mr. Henderson, who has come to be regarded as the mouthpiece of this somewhat formidable movement.

The declaration starts off with the statement of the attitude of the conference on the war. It begins with the dubious statement that "whatever may be the cause of the outbreak of the war (are the Socialists and Labor men who comprised this conference alone in having failed to discover the cause?) it is clear that the peoples of Europe had no hand in it."

Does this mean that when the armies of Germany, with the almost unanimous support of the German people, including the great body of the German Socialists, began their attack on civilization, they did so at the behest of a government which did not truly represent the German people's wishes and intentions? Or that the governments of the Allied nations in their defensive operations against this monstrous attack did not as truly represent the peoples of those countries?

The Manifesto goes on to say, however, that the conference cannot ignore the general causes of the European conflict, itself "a monstrous product of the antagonisms which tear asunder capitalistic society and of the policy of colonial dependencies and aggressive imperialism which International Socialism has never ceased to fight, and in which every government has its share of responsibility."

We contend that this interpretation of the war and its origin has all the characteristic haziness of socialistic speculation regarding the great conflict. We protest against it, too, as apportioning a divided responsibility for the criminal assault which precipitated the conflict. That the secret springs of the dynastic ambitions of the Hohenzollerns are to be traced to "the antagonisms of a capitalistic society," is too far-fetched. That such antagonisms, along with the aggressive imperialism of all nations, may lead to other wars, and that for that reason ought to be got rid of, may be admitted. But we are considering the present war, the origin of which is now pretty clearly revealed. It is clear, too, that the elements that gave rise to it do not call for any laborious delving into the roots of history. At all events, the Socialists have shown themselves incapable of uncovering its roots, or suggesting any hypotheses that are not mutually destructive.

But we have not the time to consider this phase of the Manifesto, and must turn our attention to what is proposed as measures of reconstruction when the war is ended—

those having special bearing upon the future condition of the workers of the world.

We are told that "it will be a device of the capitalist interests to pretend that the treaty of peace need concern itself only with the cessation of the struggles of the armed forces and with any necessary territorial readjustments." The Manifesto then goes on to picture—we fear too accurately—the condition that must prevail with the demobilization of millions of soldiers—"in the face of the scarcity of industrial capital, the shortage of raw materials, and the insecurity of commercial enterprise." It therefore urges upon the labor parties of all countries the necessity of exerting pressure upon their governments—to do what? the reader will ask. Throw open the natural resources of employment, so as to provide the men of the demobilized armies with opportunities for work, and to replenish exhausted capital? Not at all. But to induce governments to undertake "the preparation of plans for the execution of all public works (such as the repairing of roads, the erection of schools and public buildings, the provision of working class dwellings and the reclamation and afforestation of lands.") And then it naively adds: "It is now known that in this way it is quite possible for any government to prevent if it chooses the occurrence of any widespread or prolonged involuntary unemployment."

This Manifesto in that part which is drawn up by a sub-committee, and is entitled "Labor and the New Social Order," asserts that the end of the old civilization has come, and that a new civilization must now be rebuilt. With becoming modesty they say that it is impossible "even with the drastic clearing away that is now going on, to build society anew in a year or two of feverish reconstruction."

The Party will, nevertheless, not be deterred in its attempt to rebuild the new civilization, and it announces what it is pleased to call its Four Pillars. On these all succeeding proposals are based. They are as follows:

- (a) The Universal Enforcement of the National Minimum;
- (b) The Democratic Control of Industry;
- (c) The Revolution in National Finance; and
- (d) The Surplus Wealth for the Common Good.

The Universal Enforcement of the National Minimum means more than what has come to be known as the Minimum Wage Law, for "its object is to secure for each person, in good and bad times alike (how are there going to be any bad times with everything so beautifully regulated?) of all the requisites of healthy life and worthy citizenship." There is to be a Minimum of Leisure, Health and Education, we are told. The makers of this Manifesto say that in this they have "the support of all enlightened statesmen and economists of the world." In fear of being declared neither a statesman nor enlightened, we assert that this

Manifesto is about the most ridiculous document from the standpoint of statesmanship and economics ever conceived outside of a madhouse.

It is quite hopeless in the limits of a REVIEW article to speak of all its preposterous recommendations. But that we may get a partial view of its curious dislocations here is what is to be done with established industries:

They are to be owned—nationalized.

They are to be democratically controlled.

Then they are to be taxed.

And as to the kind of taxes (though with nearly everything owned, one wonders what remains to be taxed and what the government needs with taxes anyhow) the Manifesto says: "We are one with the manufacturer, the farmer and the trader in objecting to taxes interfering with production and commerce, or hampering transport or communication. In all these matters—once more in contrast with the other political parties, and by no means in the interests of the wage earners alone—the very definite teachings of economic science should no longer be disregarded."

Here are a few of the taxes the Party favors:

The Income and Supertax.

Excess Profits Tax.

Taxation of Land Values.

The Death Duties—Inheritance Taxes (to be greatly increased). Then (and finally) a Special Capital Levy, charged, we are told, "on all property with exemption of the smallest savings, and for the rest with rates very steeply graduated." Then there are to be taxes on Mining Royalties, of course, though elsewhere we are told that Mines are to be "immediately nationalized"(!)

The Party seems to be a good deal mixed on what is the real remedy to be applied to each given industry, whether to nationalize it or tax it. And for fear that one of these remedies alone and of itself may not suffice, they would then own it and tax it, too! And if you don't like "democratic control," a phrase of some popularity now-a-days, or think it does not go far enough, why then this accommodating Labor Party will nationalize it for you, and if this is not enough it will do both!

And then, as if the individual were not sufficiently taken care of with everything, including himself, merged in the State, and for fear, we suppose, that he might even then lapse into pauperism,—for how incorrigible is Man, in spite of the Four Pillars, Universal Enforcement of the National Minimum, the Democratic Control of Industry, The Revolution in National Finance, and the Surplus Wealth for the Common Good—he has now got to be insured! The State must therefore "expropriate all profit-making Industrial Insurance, for the establishment of an indispensable Funeral Benefit."

We forbear to hint that after all this has been done for him a man has really ceased to be an individual at all, and little remains for him beyond a decent burial. But after the State has done all this for him why should he still be in need of the necessarily small amount for funeral expenses?

Is it because the makers of this wonderful platform doubt the efficacy of their most comprehensive plan to do anything for the man while living, and that it was therefore well to provide for his funeral when he died?

We are told that "Only in this way can the great staff of Insurance agents find equitable conditions of employment, compensation for any disturbance (so there are still to be financial disturbances under this wonderful social system?) and security of tenure for the discharge of the steadily increasing functions of the Government in Vital Statistics and Social Insurance."

There seems always to obtrude some vague apprehension as to whether a measure to accomplish what is sought is sufficiently efficacious. So the makers of this platform, not to be caught napping, immediately propose another. If one will not work, say they, the other will; both together, for a certainty!

For example, with the government undertaking all sorts of work for the purpose of doing away with unemployment, and assuming the control of all the great industries, we might conclude that the problem of unemployment had now been solved, and that nothing more remained to be done! Vain thought! We are also to have "a Social Insurance Against Unemployment."

This to is be like the present Out of Work Benefit administered by Trades Unions, and is to be called "State Unemployment Insurance."

After all this it would seem that something might be left for the individual from his now scanty store of plundered initiative. Forlorn hope, again! The Reader has forgotten the Fourth Pillar—the Surplus for the Common Good. This surplus is "to be secured, on the one hand, by Nationalization and Municipalization, and on the other by the steeply graduated Taxation of Private Income and Riches."

We confess that this opens too wide a vista to tempt the adventurous vision of the ordinary Single Taxer. We observe that the makers of this Manifesto do not advance much beyond the threshold. Society, they remind us, no more than the individual lives by bread alone. This surplus for the Common Good is to be used for the promotion of music, literature and the fine arts, among other more material things. It is an inviting prospect,. The nationalization of literature and music carries us outside the realm of pure economics and into a limbo of speculation where we hesitate to follow these very ingenious gentlemen.

The portion of this volume that we have commented upon—the most important part, since it is the official pronouncement of the Inter-Allied and Socialist Conference—really occupies only one quarter of the volume before us. The other three quarters are the work of Arthur Henderson, and consist of a review of the aims and objects of the Labor Party, in several chapters. It may be considered as a defence of the measures set forth in the Manifesto, and as such demands some consideration.

It is curious how the phrase "democracy" recurs in Mr

Henderson's pages. It seems clear that this new movement, ushering in an era of regulation, nationalization and control, can hardly be called "democratic." In the narrow etymological sense it may be. Democracy, from the Greek word *demos*—the rule of the people—may indeed be loosely held to mean the governance of the fifty-one per cent. But democracy has come to have a more far-reaching and inclusive meaning, and to carry with it something more than this. The supremacy of the State is not admissible in this new and broader concept of democracy, and something of the philosophy of individualism, and something of the recognition of economic laws and the disposition to trust them, are included in it. The movement led by Arthur Henderson has no right to be called democratic, whatever else it may be.

There are other utterances of Mr. Henderson which, taken in connection with what is proposed, are impossible of reconciliation. He says: "What the workmen want is freedom, a definite elevation of their status, the abolition of the system of wage slavery which destroyed their independence and made freedom in any real sense impossible." Democracy to Mr. Henderson is rather an indefinable aspiration than a principle capable of being worked out in legislation.

Mr. Henderson is a man of high ideals, but of narrow vision. His somewhat loose thinking on the war is in line with his loose thinking on economics. He feels strongly but seems incapable of translating his emotions into practical measures. He is largely under the tyranny of socialistic terminology; he talks of freedom, and his ideals are bodied forth in a scheme of tortuous regulation, a State complex and ordered in minutest detail, a vast series of laws piled one upon another—a dreadful, impersonal, political monstrosity!

Is it not obvious that all this cumbersome framework with which it is proposed to replace the present social structure takes but scanty account of the foundations upon which any enduring edifice can be reared? These wonderful Four Pillars—on what are they to rest? Surely upon the land. Then why not build with some regard to the foundations?

Why do all these measures and recommendations, arduously and laboriously formulated, with an eye to an almost infinite prevision, amuse by their complexity and confusion? Why is it that their futility, their amazing contradictions, are obvious to all but the makers of this remarkable platform?

Is it because social systems are not spun, spider-like, complexly woven webs, from the bowels of men's imagination, however ingenious? The social system is here—what is needed is to discover the laws by which its functions are governed. God or Nature has made Man, given him the faculty and powers of labor, provided him with the land, the reservoir of the raw material from which to extract wealth and to fashion the tools for the making of more wealth. Whatever else is to be done, whatever artificial

plans are to be adopted, there must first be free access to this reservoir. And of this truth there is no recognition in this Manifesto.

And something else is not recognized. There is a great natural law of co-operation, by which under the terms of free exchange, fullest satisfaction of human desires are secured. Neither can this law work where freedom of access to the natural reservoir is denied.

Do not our friends of the Inter-Allied Conference see this? Has it not been preached to them for thirty years? Is it not of all things the most obvious to those who will but think?

If our comments upon these proposals seem unfriendly it is not because we regard them unsympathetically. The tendency is all too common and all too natural for men to seek in artificial adjustments the remedy for economic inequality. But existing maladjustments are originally of man's making, and the remedy is to be sought in the natural laws and in fundamental principles of justice—in the removal of those artificial obstacles which block the way to economic equality. We say the tendency is natural to build artificiality upon artificiality. We need to be on our guard against this tendency in ourselves.

"The way is all so clear and plain
That we may lose the way."

The Only Possible Economic Readjustment

SINGLE Taxers know that the economic readjustment in Europe to follow the war will necessarily illustrate the vital truth of Henry George's doctrine. If economic rent is left in the hands of the few, or, indeed, in private hands, no matter how many, rather than treated as the sole source of public revenue, the political liberties won by millions, will not avail to prevent the creation of privileged classes. If the ruined cities and devastated rural areas of Belgium, France, Russia, Serbia, are rehabilitated under the old economic system that does not treat economic rent as public revenue, a few persons will be enriched by the process of rehabilitation, and the generous aid of less unfortunate regions afforded to those war-wasted areas will help to swell the profits of the privileged.

Much of Continental Europe has seen or is seeing political and social revolution, but these things are vain without economic revolution. The great democratic revolution in France of a century-and-a-quarter ago gave the peasant his small land holdings, but did not avail to prevent France of the last three generations from developing contrasts of vast wealth and hideous poverty. This war just closed was truly a war to make democracy safe the world over, but "one thing thou lackest" is as true of modern democracy as of the virtuous youth in the New Testament story. We have helped the Central European powers toward political and social democracy, but we and the peoples of the Entente are quite as much in need of economic revolution