

OPEN LETTER

TO A

BRITISH SOCIALIST

We all know that the advent to Parliament of the "Labour" Party brought many recruits to the Socialist ranks in this country and swelled the wave of Socialist enthusiasm. The "Labour" Party is now to all intents and purposes *in extremis*, with one foot in the grave and the other in the Ministerial lobby. You admit, I take it, that the failure of that party in the Commons has weakened the movement in the country to a corresponding degree. I do not deny that many of the recruits who joined during the "boom" period remain in the ranks. But there have been many defections. The number has grown with the increasing impotence of the "Labour" group in Parliament.

If you accept the dictum "Once a Socialist always a Socialist," these defections need cause no uneasiness. If, on the other hand, you regard that maxim as nothing more than a pious opinion—something akin to "that blessed word, Mesopotamia," let us say—you will feel less contented. I take it that you *are* less contented. You have noted, also, the marked decrease in Socialist enthusiasm of late—anti-armaments and thirty-bob-a-week campaigns notwithstanding. In a movement such as the Socialist movement is, or was, enthusiasm is of greater importance than mere numerical strength. The wave has subsided. So far as Socialist representation is concerned, "all is calm and"—dull. And we *did* hope that all would be "merry and bright," didn't we? We might have guessed that politics is a very, *very* serious business!

For five lean years Socialists have been fed on a diet of which the staple has been Dead Sea fruit. This is, I suspect, due to their having delegated certain of their leaders to bring down manna from Heaven—which is, one gathers, located somewhere in the office of an unscrupulous Welsh solicitor. Quite a considerable number of Socialists are dissatisfied with the diet. It might have been more nutritious had they insisted on doing their own catering, in the first place; instead of which they appointed forty inefficient cooks to draw up an unsatisfactory menu. The workers have got a bad attack of political dyspepsia in consequence.

The lesson has been a costly one. There seems no doubt about

that. But how far it has been read aright is less certain. Undoubtedly, many earnest Socialists are of opinion that the *principle* of Socialist representation stands—like Scotland, but unlike certain Scotch “Labour” men—where it did. “We want a fresh set of men, a new batch of divinely ordained leaders!” is the cry, the assumption being that the failure of the “Labour” Party was due to the defects of its personnel. So the British Socialist Party is being formed, and you and your comrades are to tread once more the stony path which leads to Stagnation.

Another path, requiring much pioneer work, but a straighter path, a path which will bring the workers many a day’s march nearer to Freedom, was outlined at the Manchester conference the other day. But the conference chose the old path. To have done otherwise would have been to betray a deplorable lack of Political Sagacity, Plain Commonsense, and various other common things. But there is still time to pull up. Whilst you are considering the point you might do worse than remember that the great champions of the people’s freedom in the past (I am *not* thinking of Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Winston Churchill, or any other member of the band of political brothers) were notoriously lacking in Political Sagacity, Plain Commonsense, and all the rest of it. And they were never complimented on their “gentlemanly behaviour.”

The policy of pouring new wine into old bottles is a futile one. The probabilities are distinctly against your British Socialist M.P.s doing any better than the discredited “Labour” group, assuming that they, too, are relied upon to obtain legislative manna for an emaciated proletariat. In the unlikely event of their remaining proof against the intangible, soul-destroying “atmosphere” of the Commons, they will be powerless against the Caucus, so far as genuine Socialist legislation is concerned.

It is well to note, also, that the action of the Caucus in allowing its puppets to vote themselves a beggarly pittance of £400 a year (whilst successfully frustrating the attempts of some of their constituents to wallow in the luxury of £1 a week) will not help the British Socialist Party to get its candidates elected to the House. Don’t think it! The Caucus is too much in love with life to commit suicide.

Where, then, lies the solution of the problem with which you, as a member of the British Socialist Party, are faced? Not in the complete abandonment of political representation, I suppose? You are not prepared to go to that length—yet. You may be driven to it, in the end. I think you will. But it will be experience, not argument, that will teach you the futility of Parliamentary action.

Meantime, I would suggest that you subordinate your political operations, as a party, to your industrial activities. In other words, don’t you think the British Socialists would be well advised to lay stress on the need for Direct Action?

You will be told, of course, by “Labour” M.P.s and would-be “Labour” M.P.s (the latter are far more plausible) that industrial action by means of the strike is costly, foolish, antiquated, barbarous. “The brutal method of industrial warfare,” Mr. A. Henderson, M.P.,

termed it the other day. Direct Action is not gentlemanly. Let us admit it. But the fact remains that the workers—and the other parties to this “brutal warfare,” the employers—refuse to act like gentlemen. They consider that the issues involved are too serious to be handled with kid gloves. They are right. I suggest to you that, given an efficient industrial organisation such as could be obtained by vigorous propaganda on behalf of Direct Action, the strike (whether actual or threatened) is likely to prove more effective and in the long run less costly—to the workers, that is—than five years of “gentlemanly” behaviour in the House of Commons.

The “Labour” tribunes will tell you, when it suits their purpose, that the tactics adopted by the workers of other countries are not reliable criteria, such tactics being governed by “peculiar local conditions.” Despite their solemn warnings, let us glance for a moment at France, where the workers concentrate chiefly upon industrial action, whilst sending Socialist Deputies to the Chamber with “watching briefs.”

The comparative poverty of the French Trade Unions has forced them to take more or less common action against the employing class. The *grève générale*, in lieu of the obsolete sectional strike, has been attempted more than once. Every attempt has brought the weapon nearer to perfection. (It is well to recognise this, since our “Labour” friends tell us that the weapon has failed.) So effective has Direct Action proved in France, that the capitalist and ex-Socialist politicians of the Republic have threatened to arrest the officials of the great Trade Unions in the event of another serious outbreak.

Mr. Asquith and his colleagues are not likely to order the arrest of the forty indomitable “Labour” M.P.s. Why? Because Parliamentary representation holds no terrors for the employing class. Their fright in 1906 was only temporary. The watchdogs of Labour have had their teeth drawn since then, and the extraction has been quite painless.

Depend upon it, Messrs. Mann and Tillett are far more dangerous outside the House than the whole “Labour” group inside. If we haven’t realised that fact, the employing class have. Moreover, Direct Action can checkmate the master class not only upon the industrial field, but in the world of politics also. You can only govern in two ways—by force or by consent of the governed. The perfecting of industrial organisation and the education of the workers in the methods of Direct Action will, ere long, render government by force impossible. That leaves only one possible method of government, doesn’t it?

The workers, when they reach that happy state, may come to the conclusion that instead of delegating others to govern them by their own consent, they might as well govern themselves and so save trouble and expense. But we needn’t discuss that point just now.

The sectional strike is dying, and the sympathetic strike is succeeding it very rapidly. The general strike—the “impracticability” of which, for any other purpose than that of pacificism, has long been a theme with “Labour” politicians—is well within sight. With the “Labour” triumph of 1906, the workers turned a hopeful gaze towards

Westminster and rested on their oars. They have now awakened to the fact that the vessel has become waterlogged, and have commenced baling vigorously, despite the pathetic appeals of their leaders for a little more peace and quietness. Later on, they will commence shifting the barnacles, and "Labour" M.P.'s will be "seven a penny"—at which price even their Liberal friends will refuse to buy! That is, roughly, the meaning of the present industrial unrest. What is the British Socialist Party going to do about it?

The general tendency towards Direct Action is so unmistakable that the "Labour" politicians have hastened to pat the workers on the back and tell them they are plucky fellows. "A leader is a man who sees where the crowd is going and rushes after them with whoops of joy." That is an American definition, but it seems to apply on this side of the Atlantic also. Of course, the "joy" is not always of the heartfelt variety. But no matter!

What you, as a member of the British Socialist Party, have to consider is: which path is the new party to tread? On the choice the future of the B.S.P. will depend. To preach "Peace and Parliament," is to court destruction. The workers have tried both. They are coming to see that the cry might easily be translated "Perks for Place-hunters."

The House of Commons, as the supporters of the "Labour" group have learned to their cost, is "the best club in Europe." Once they realise that the industrial field is the best battleground in the world, the workers need no longer wait, cap in hand, for scraps from the Westminster table. You and your comrades in the British Socialist Party have yet time to choose your ground. Which is it to be—the Club or the Battlefield?

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