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Socialism and Parliament

1923

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The advent of a Labour opposition in the House of Commons, the near possibility of that opposition becoming His Majesty's Government, have revived interest in the question of parliamentary action. Bitter plaints at the historic failure of Parliamentary methods are tempered with a faint hope that something may be achieved by parliamentarism. It is forgotten that reform activity means constant trotting round the fool's parade, continuous movement in a vicious circle. Something must be done for expectant mothers, for homeless couples wishing to housekeep, for rent-resisters, something to reform here or there, regardless of the fact that capitalism is a hydra-headed monster, that the reforms needed are as innumerable as the abuses begotten of the capitalist system, and such abuses increase with every modification of capitalist administration, the better to perpetuate the system. Under these circumstances it is necessary to restate the arguments against parliamentary activity, to explain and to prove that parliament was never intended to emancipate the working class from the evils of capitalism, that it never can and never will achieve this result.

So much is clear from the very conditions under which electioneering is conducted. Before even a single vote has been obtained the Labour candidate has compromised. His very candidature exposes the weakness and inefficiency of parliamentary action. Seeking votes from an electorate anxious for some immediate reform, he puts aside the need for social emancipation to pander to some passing bias for urgent useless amelioration. He panders to prejudice, and avoids facts. This is because Parliament is an institution existing for the defence of class society, the domination of man by man, the representation of opinions, and not the administration by the wealth producers of the wealth produced. Consequently the candidate must time the pulse of capitalist society, subject his first principles to the opinions arising out of capitalist conditions, to current local superstitions and respectabilities and immediate needs or fancied interests. He does not aim at assisting the toilers to secure the direct administration of wealth production by the wealth producers in the interests of the wealth producers. He aims only at representing, as toilers, in the capitalist political institution, the opinion of men who must remain toilers so long as the parliamentary system continues. Pandering to capitalist needs and interests, electioneering stifles the revolutionary idea without which the Social Revolution and the Industrial Commonwealth can never be achieved.

Emma Goldman has stated the point well in the following words: "Parliamentarians are not Socialists at all, but politicians. Their only purpose in the world is to get the old politicians out, in order that they might work themselves into their places. In their mad effort to get office they deny their birthright for a mess of pottage, and sacrifice their true principles and real convictions on the polluted altar of politics."

Thus Ramsay MacDonald wrote a letter in October, 1910, in connection with the selection of a Labour candidate, in which he stated: "The whole matter was very carefully considered, and I was instructed to state that my committee cannot agree to conferences for the selection of candidates being held on a Sunday."

Is not this letter eloquent of the fact that all parliamentary action necessitates abandonment of principle? Does it not proceed from the capitalist code, recognise a superstitious cant current in respectable capitalist society, and assume a desire to maintain the integrity of capitalist illusions? And is there not at least one Labour M.P. for London, who has opposed Sunday games on the Commons, because he wants to preserve the rest-day on the Sabbath? All which means that parliamentarism is the domination of the working class, its aim and outlook by the small trader's party, its cramped vision and mean class interest. It is the perpetual sacrifice of democracy to social and economic exploitation.

No one knew this better than Marx. Shortly after the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848, the revolutionary storm that burst over Europe called forth Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire and Revolution and Counter-Revolution. Both these works are classics of revolt, and bear on the vexed question of parliamentarism. As history and philosophy they have never been surpassed. Definitely, and with monotonous reiteration, their author proclaims Parliamentary and Constitutional action to be counter-revolution, because the strength of the middle class, the small-traders' class, is in Parliament, whilst the workers' strength is on the street. He shows that Parliament is at the mercy of the military, not the military at the deposition of Parliament,: and ridicules "constitutional freedom" as a comfortable middle-class way of negating real freedom. He also impeaches Social-Democracy, in name and in substance, that very Socialist parliamentarism of which Ramsay MacDonald is the leader to-day: the "proletarian leaders' " political betrayal of the workers to the small traders' interests, the sad record of inherent weaknesses, constitutional limitations, revolutionary trimmings, and treacherous substance. Parliamentarians, Marx dismisses, in scornful words that apply forcibly to the acrobats at Westminster of to-day, as poor, weak-minded men, so little accustomed to anything like success during their generally very obscure lives, that they actually believe their parliamentary amendments more important than external events. Could better description be conceived of Welsh, the miner-poet M.P., who followed up his much applauded maiden speech by an account in the Sunday Express of the ghosts of dead legislators, all capitalists, he saw at Westminster and his veneration for the atmosphere of "the Mother of Parliaments," actually employing this cant capitalist description as his own? Can one imagine the speech of such a man being intended to emancipate the workers when its author is so desperately anxious for admiration and a political career. Fancy seeing the ghost of that hoary old humbug, Gladstone, and wishing

to emulate him when one should be inspired by the spirit of one's dead and living comrades of mine, the field and workshops.

Welsh pled in the atmosphere of capitalism to the assembly of capitalism for the amelioration of capitalist conditions. He awed the representatives of capitalist finance! Are we to believe that their awe will militate against their determination to perpetuate capitalism ? Are we to forget that parliamentarism gave France Aristide Briand and President Millerand? That men who once sentimentalised as Welsh does, murdered in Germany Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg? Are we to suppose that speeches in Parliament effect legislation, that they reach the workers outside of Parliament, that they appeal to the capitalists within? Nothing of the kind.

Speaking in the debate on the address, on Tuesday, February 13th, 1923, John Wheatley complained of the empty benches to which anti-parliamentarians always said he would address his protests. The following night the Pall Mall Gazette reported his protest with a sneer as follows: "During the dinner hour last night, when the Labour members seized the opportunity to harangue each other and a handful of Government supporters on the grievances of the hunger-marchers, Mr. Wheatley was indiscreet enough to make reference to the smallness of the attendance."

But it may be said that Parliament is a sounding board, that although the members withdraw from the street corners and the workers' lecture halls, the speeches they make in Parliament are broadcasted through the columns of the ordinary press to the workers of the country. This is not true. Here are the number of words given by the London penny morning papers to Labour M.P.'s who took part in the House of Commons' debate on Tuesday, February l3th, 1923:

The papers other than the Daily Herald made no reference to the intervention in the debates of David Kirkwood, J. Maxton, J. Buchanan, Neil Maclean, Campbell Stephen, J. Muir and T. Johnson. If Wheatley makes a good speech we have to turn to Forward for the public report, which means that the report reaches only the readers of Forward, and is confined more or less to Socialist readers. Newbold's efforts are reported in the Communist press. Scrymgeour relies on his Prohibitionist. Obviously the value of speeches in Parliament turn upon the power of the press outside and exercise no influence beyond the point allowed by that press. So long as the workers are dependent upon that press for their news and for their outlook, so long as they have no intention of doing other on the industrial field than to obey for wages the press magnates and so to poison the wells of knowledge, Labour parliamentarism is impotent as a propaganda activity. When the workers decide no longer to be the stool pigeons of their own destruction, Labour parliamentarism will be unnecessary. The complete failure of parliament as a sounding board compels us to realise that the political struggle of the class

war is an economic one, a direct struggle between the financial ownership of the press and of the workers' thought and the revolutionary agitation and social-industrial power of the workers themselves. So long as the workers are devoid of economic power, so long as they remain represented slaves where they should be active and communing freemen and freewomen, the workers have no social voice, no press, no political power.

Aristide Briand, who was to become the miserable capitalist premier of France after he entered on a parliamentary career, put this point well when he made his famous speech for the defence before the jury at Tonne in 1903: " In general, history proves that the people have never obtained anything except what they have taken, or could have taken themselves. This is also true of every particular case. How many stations are there on the road to the Liberation of Humanity that are not marked by pools of blood? Even apart from the periods of revolutions, it is alway under the effect of menace — through a successful intimidation that improvements in the condition of the people — step by step — have been granted. The power of persuasion, even when combined with that of circumstances, cannot suffice to dictate laws to the bourgeois class. And besides, were these laws created, would there be any security that they would be applied, if the sanction for their existence did not exist in the firmly founded and, permanent revolutionary strength of the proletariat?"

It is only the effect of this menace, only the fear of the power of the revolutionary agitator outside parliament, that persuades the capitalist class to tolerate the presence of Labour members inside. This is well-known to every student of politics. Bonar Law, during the General Election of 1922, expressed the need for Labour members in Parliament in order to avert revolutionary activity and collapse of the capitalist system. Major Birchall, the Conservative member for N. E. Leeds, who publishes an occasional printed letter from Westminster to his constituents, backs this up. Describing the effect on the Commons of the Labour Party's speech-making in the debate on the address, February, 1923, he says: "Chief interest was attracted, as usual, by those who made the most noise — the Labour members. There have been several scenes, but no one was any the worse for the small explosions which occurred. These extreme men are much safer in the House of Commons than outside."

The Labour members respond anxiously to this idea. They also urge on Parliament the need for Parliament to do something for the down-and-out in order to avert social revolution. However often they advise the worker that revolution is impossible, they know and feel that it is not impossible. So do the Conservative reactionaries. Whatever division of interest is created by careerhunting, however much difference may exist between the extent that one is willing to palliate as opposed to the other, the Labour member and the Tory member are moved by

a common dread. They are admittedly moved by fear of the consequences of Anti-Parliamentary agitation if nothing is done by Parliament. Thus, Mr. Scrymgeour, the honorable member for Dundee, in his maiden speech in the House ,of Commons in November, 1922, warned the Government of the strength of the Anti-Parliamentary feeling existing amongst the working-class in the following passage, which embodies the spirit of the entire speech:

"I speak as one representing a most important industrial constituency in which there has been a very decisive change in its Parliamentary representation . . .

"I want to say that there is a growing conviction amongst the vast body of the people in this country, and by that I mean the workers, that this House has unfortunately, altogether, irrespective of what Government is in power, been trifling with these gigantic issues.

"I have had considerable experience in different, parts of the country, more especially among the miners of Scotland, and I know there are forces growing amongst them which are absolutely convinced in regard to aggressive ideas and arguments which have been driven home in public debates by one whose name will be familiar to all in this House, I mean Mr. Guy Aldred. Mr. Aldred is a very able man and he is desperately in earnest in every point which he drives home, and he was cheered to the echo when he denounced any belief in religion and when he was committing himself to the most drastic line of action, he was cheered by men and women on every point. I want Hon. Members to realise what that means.

"I wish to emphasise that this House has not been grappling with those issues in the way that earnest working men and women feel they ought to be grappled with. With all due respect to those who officially represent the Labour Party, I have pointed out from my independent platform that there has been a growing feeling amongst the workers that the Labour Party has not been so aggressive or determined in carrying out their professions, and as the outcome of this there has been a growing feeling in favour of the Communist movement. My anxiety is that we should have some clear line of action laid down on this question in order to give proof to the workers that we mean business."

Is it not clear from this speech that the only live political movement of the working-class is the Anti-Parliamentary, that that movement sets the pace of all social reform, that Labour members speak from fear of its criticism, that Conservative members listen because such talk is less effective than the action it holds up, because parley is better than revolution for those who live on the backs of those who produce?

It may be said that something real might be achieved, that there would be less pandering if only the Labour members were in a majority at Westminster and were sure of the complete backing of the working-class as a class. It is said that

revolutionists have done nothing at all for the people. This pleading is very old, and reminds one of the very stupid speech made by Wilhelm Liebknecht long ago at the famous Erfurt Social Democratic Congress. W e select two gems that sum up the entire apology of the Parliamentarians — and destroy it with equal conciseness:

" The fact that up to the present time we have got nothing from Social Democracy is not a valid objection to Parliamentarism, but is simply due to our comparative weakness in the country among the people."

"What have the Anarchists done? Nothing, absolutely nothing."

It never occurred to W. Liebknecht to think, nor does it occur to modern Parliamentarians to reflect, that if the Anarchists or Social Revolutionaries achieve nothing by Anti-Parliamentarism and the Parliamentarians achieve nothing by Parliamentarism, that honours are easy between the two sections. Again, if the explanation is the weakness of Socialist thought amongst the workers, the cure is Socialist agitation. Such weakness may explain the failure of the Parliamentarians. If so, it only means that Parliament can do nothing for the people that they cannot do for themselves, that Parliamentary activity, therefore, is unnecessary. Certainly, this weakness — aggravated by men withdrawing to the Parliamentary arena when they should be working and agitating directly amongst the workers on the field of production, spreading the gospel at the street-corner, in the lecture hall, and wherever the workers assemble to consider and discuss — explains the failure of revolutionary thought to translate itself into achievement. The difference between Parliamentarism and Revolutionism consists in the effect of overcoming this weakness that bulks so largely in the Parliamentarian apology. Let agitation acquaint the workers with Anti-Parliamentary thought and they think in the terms of the Socialist Commonwealth, they stand for the direct enfranchisement of industry, for immediate working-class society, a true golden age. But let the agitation be Parliamentarian, and the workers have no other notion than that of state pauperism, the direct enfranchisement of a Labour bureaucracy to administer Capitalism and preserve its authority by a system of doles, the real servitude of the workers to an age of gold. Parliamentarism can never give the workers control of industry, can never solve the problem of Capitalism, can never secure to the wealth-producers the ownership by themselves of the means of production and distribution. Access to the means of life proceed from direct action. A class-conscious proletariat will emancipate itself by spontaneous action. A consciousless proletariat will tolerate Parliamentarism because of its consciouslessness, because it lacks initiative, and can never be emancipated. Labour Parliamentarism is but the shadow and not the substance of working-class emancipation. It is the shadow that masquerades as the body and sets up in opposition to the body, proclaiming

the body to be the shadow. No one knows this better than the Parliamentarians themselves.

H. M. Hyndman was the father of Parliamentarism in the Socialist movement in this country. Naturally, he was at one with the Parliamentarians of Socialism in Germany. Yet during the years of navalism and militarism, of preparedness for the Great War by the capitalist interests in Britain and Germany, Hyndman and his colleagues in the Social Democratic movement here were busy prating of the German menace. They watched the growth of Social Democratic representation in the Reichstag and they spoke of the achievements of Parliamentarism. But they never explained how, if Social Democratic representation in the Reichstag meant the existence of a Socialist proletariat and a real working-class conquest of political power, there could be a German menace. Why should Germany, with its powerful Social Democratic representation in the Reichstag, with its voting strength greater, much greater, than its representation in the Reichstag, have been the military menace of Europe? W. Liebknecht's apology is invalidated by reason of the very great disproportion between its rapid increase of voting strength and the smallness in the increase of its membership of the Reichstag. It required many more votes to return a Social Democrat than it took to return any avowed capitalist candidate. Surely, this is an actual conquest of political power by the workers to the extent of the votes polled. Surely, these representatives were backed in the country. Yet they were returned only that they might administer the Kaiser's imperial interests. Hyndman and his Parliamentarians took this view. Similarly, the German Parliamentarians considered the British Parliamentarians as representatives of Britain's imperial interests. Both were right. In both countries Parliamentarism expressed the failure of the workers to be class-conscious, and but measured their sheepish subjection to a brutal and impudent Imperialism. The Great War revealed its impotence and expressed its opposition to Socialist thought and action and to the emancipation of the workers.

In 1912, Karl Liebknecht captured the Kaiser's seat, Potsdam, for the politics of the red republic. Two years later, his electors were shedding their blood in defence of the black eagle. They were fighting enthusiastically in the army of the Kaiser who, in 1891, had addressed publicly these words to the soldiers of the Fatherland: "Recruits! Before the altar and the servant of God you have given me the oath of allegiance . . . you are my soldiers, you have surrendered yourselves to me body and soul. Only one enemy can exist for you — my enemy. With the present Socialist machinations, it may happen that I shall order you to shoot your own relatives, your brothers, or even your parents — which God forbid — and then you are bound in duty implicitly to obey my orders."

Yes, the good Social Democratic Parliamentarians, the conquest-of-parliamentary-power-ites, fought against the enemies of this Imperial assassin and died

winning his Iron Crosses. They helped to imprison the heroic Socialist son of the step-father of German Parliamentarism, Wilhelm Liebknecht. Once a social revolutionist, imprisoned and exiled for his loyalty to Socialism, a man who took unkindly to compromise, but finally consented swearing he would ne'er consent, Wilhelm Liebknecht at last sacrificed his revolutionary energy to further and consolidate the futile Parliamemtarism of Lassalle: "Through universal suffrage to victory." It was the inevitable logic of that Parliamentarism, its appeal to immediate economic interests, that reconciled the German workers to their imprisonment of Karl Liebknecht. The father would say that Parliamentarism could not save the son because the Socialists were comparatively weak in the country. Well, after the political revolution of 1918, the Social Democrats, the Parliamentary Socialists, were in power in the country. They drove the Kaiser into exile. They murdered on the streets the real Socialists, the Socialists of thought and action, they became the tools of British as well as German Capitalism, and they consummated their criminal connection by becoming parties to the murder in cold blood of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg in January, 1919. Not the Kaiser, with the reluctant acquiescence of the Parliamentary Socialists, but the Parliamentary Socialists with the acquiescence of the German Capitalists, accomplished this assassination. We cannot say that Parliamentarism has done nothing. It slaughtered to preserve the tottering power of Capitalism.

During "red week" of March, 1913, the German Social Democratic Party gained 148,108 new members, most of whom served the Kaiser in the Great War: It secured 32,298 new subscribers, few of whom hesitated to rally to the German Imperialist war-flag. It held 41,969 agitation meetings, which offered no menace to the ruling patriotism. It made house to house canvas in 1,288 cities and towns, besides distributing 6,759,320 and selling 1,580,010 books and pamphlets. Every man canvassed, every recipient of a free leaflet, every purchaser of a book or pamphlet, either served, was prepared to serve, or wished to serve the murder lords of his country.

Parliamentarism claims to represent organised labour. We concede the claim. Parliamentarism does represent organised labour. It represented organised labour before the war, whilst the capitalists of all lands were preparing for the world war. It represented organised labour during the war, whilst the capitalists of all lands were inspiring the workers with their hymns of hate. It represents organised labour to-day, whilst the capitalist clash is tinkering with and mocking the misery of the unemployed.

When the Social Democratic member for Mannheim died fighting at Luneville, for the Kaiser's Cause, it was organised labour that drove him to his doom, an economic conscript. Interviewed in London, at the end of 1913, Professor Debrück told the Daily Mail representative: "Germany for the past fifteen years

has been a country of immigration, not of emigration, and her excellent school and university system is producing every year a surplus of educated men. If we possessed more territories inhabited by inferior races, their administration and development would afford to this educated surplus the same kind of occupation and employment that Englishmen of a similar class find in Egypt or India."

One can complete the picture easily. Patriotic lectures — at so much a lecture. Journalistic exploitation of commercial rivalries — at so much a column. A Social Democratic Party anxious to secure political power and dominated in consequence by the palliative interests of the 774 Trades Councils, to which 9,418 trade unions were affiliated, with a membership of 2,339,571 members. This meant Social Democratic subserviency to the national concentration of capitalist interests. The Mannheim member never would have sat in the Reichstag had he opposed the sentiment of the economic interests which swept him on to his doom, in company with so many German workers.

Parliamentarism means being practical. In every country it operates in the same way to the same disastrous results. An industrial constituency interested in the creation of armaments may return a Labour member, but it insists that he shall support war-interests. In 1911, at the Thames Shipbuilding works, the Super Dreadnought, the battleship "Thunderer," was launched by the Archbishop of Canterbury. To the inhabitants of Canning Town, the construction of this vessel meant the subsistence level, the bread line. When the warship work was lost to the Thames, Will Thorne, West Ham's Parliamentary Socialist member, in company with Lord Roberts, addressed a huge protest meeting, demanding the work for London as opposed to Newcastle.

The force of economic compulsion explained this tragedy of misery and degradation. Inevitably, Labour M.P.'s — representing the workers as toilers subject to Capitalism, having immediate interests under Capitalism to serve — were compelled to make dramatic platform appearances in support of war. With the platforms and the press controlled by capitalist interests, with the workers conditioned by wages, there was but one comfortably popular path to take. That was to recruit. It promised immediate finance at a time of threatened famine. It guaranteed the immediate future. It voiced the immediate wants of the war workers. It was practical It meant a safe seat and governing-class votes at the election and the continuance of £400. All this had to be considered. Consequently, the Labour Party placed the services of its National Agent at the disposal of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee to assist in the necessary secretarial work. Organisation for murder was the natural task of Parliamentarism. Remember this inevitable toadying to Moloch when next some Parliamentarian tells you that Parliamentarism is opposed to violence.

Parliamentarism is practical. Because it is practical it stands for Capitalism, for war, for misery, for continued class society, for mass subjection and exploitation. Naturally, and inevitably, it prepares the way for treachery, evolves from its agitators statesmen for the administration of Capitalism, open and avowed enemies of working-class emancipation. The evolution of Aristide Briand is but a study in the logic of Parliamentarisnn. His career is an Anti-Parliamentary commentary. It is but one of many.

Speaking at the Nantes Trade Union Congress in 1891, Briand said: " 'We must make use of the ballot-box,' some of you will say. Quite right! I am no opponent of the ballot-paper. But on the day when universal suffrage becomes a nuisance and a menace to the governing-class, they will do away with it. And in an emergency they will even have the workers shot down."

Speaking in the Chamber of Deputies, as Premier of France, on October 29th, 1910, the same Briand defended the methods he employed to suppress the French Railway strike in the following terms: "If the Government had not found in the law a possibility of defending the existence of the nation when the country was in danger, if we could not have protected the frontier line of France by legal methods, then, gentlemen, we would have assured the running of the railways which are necessary to France's defence by methods which are illegal. It would have been our duty."

The illegal defence of capitalist interests is the natural product of Parliamentarism. Marx destroys once and for all the case for Parliamentarism when he shows in his civil War in France that the issue in the social conflict is between the Empire and the Commune. Written in 1871 to criticise and to depict the struggle of the Paris Commune, this work shows how the State Power originated from the days of absolute monarchy, and how the placing of the Government under Parliamentary control was placing it "under the direct control of the propertied classes." All which trenchant criticism leads Marx to utter his final challenge to Parliamentary Socialism, of which he was very proud: "But the working-class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own political purposes."

Marx shows how political changes have occurred "simultaneously with economic changes in society" and depicts the State power as the national engine of class despotism, a public force organised for the social enslavement of labour by capital. He proves, as did Daniel De Leon later, despite all his talk about the civilised plane, by inexorable economic logic, that universal suffrage can never lead the workers to victory, can never emancipate them from the shackles of wage-slavery. Did not William Morris, the greatest of all English Socialist thinkers, reiterate in pamphlet after pamphlet a like logic? Was not John Most through his experiences in the Reichstag, driven to the same conclusion? History shows how

right were these Anti-Parliamentarian conclusions. Parliamentary power was conceded to the people only to avert revolution, a toy to keep the noisy children quiet. Parliamentary power was developed by the slow assassination of the people's liberty and power of action.

One needs but to study the wonderful message of Paris, the Paris of the Great French Revolution, to discover how Parliament outrages and betrays the struggle of the people. The National Assembly, the Convention, the Safety Committees, the Directory — a consistent Parliamentary debacle, a natural evolution, ending in Napoleon and Empire and the tragedy of French Imperialism. The Commune and the Sections, Proletarian and Anti-Parliamentary Institutions, serving the people, strangled by order of the Bourgeois Democracy and Parliamentarism, shopkeeper politics.

For the Assembly and the Conventions were representative institutions. Here was the Parliament that betrayed and assassinated the rights of the people. The Commune and the Sections were not representative institutions. They were the people themselves — the forums of discussions and decision. From them proceeded the life of the revolution. From Assembly and Convention the decrees to arrest the revolution. History places the forum not on a level, with Parliament, but above it. The living and imperishable record of the people's struggle proves that the people had but to resolve, but to realise their claims in thought, to more than realise them in fact, as Paris did in those years of heroic striving. True, oratory reached a high level in both Assembly and Convention. But it was only in response to the demands of the Commune and the Sections who would stand no halting phrases, and insisted on the oratory of the Rights of Man, of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

How the Parliamentarians sought to delay the triumph of the Republic ! How they laboured to preserve the Monarchy ! And when the Monarchy fell of its own worthlessness, when in rage and anger Commune and Sections urged its abolition, when in fear and trembling the legislators bowed before the storm, then was invented the grotesque and tremendous sham that prepared the way for Napoleon and Empire — the Republic One and Indivisible !

The idea seems magnificent, does it not? The Monarchy is dead — long live the Republic One and Indivisible!

And then the Republic begins to think for the people, to feel for the people, and to act for the people. At last it calls itself "the people" and wars on the people. It proclaims martial law and proceeds to deprive the Commune and the Sections of arms and the power to resist the Central Authority. It denies Equality of Fact and proclaims a false and metaphysical equality before the law. It crushes the life of the people, the power of spontaneous revolt, of immediate vital action in the departments, and substitutes representative action, uncontrolled decrees,

oligarchic and bureaucratic committees, all leading to misery, terror, and Empire. All that was Republican was destroyed by the Republic One and Indivisible! If only it had not been One and Indivisible! If only it had been Multiple and Divisible! If only the Republic had been Federal, drawing its vitality from the Commune, the Sections and the Primary Assemblies, instead of deriving its authority from a stagnating life-destroying Central Enacting Authority. Then it would have been a Republic of Fact, of Life and Reality; a true Republic, One and Indivisible !

So that Parliamentarism destroyed the Revolution and the Republic. It neither served nor conceived it. It preserved the Republic much as the Church preserved the teachings of Jesus. Much as the rats preserve for their nests the manuscripts of genius.

Parliamentarism has always meant the same. It was. the working-class who fought against borough-mongering, with the result that the capitalist Reform Bill of 1832 eras passed into law securing representation to the capitalist class in opposition to the landed interest. Justin McCarthy, by no means a revolutionary, states in his History of Our Own Times, that "this was all the more exasperating because the excitement and agitation and success of the Reform Bill was brought about by the working-men. They came round to the belief that they had been made tools of by the capitalists, and when the Reform Bill became law they were thrown over by those whom they had helped to pass it." The same author tells us: " It was 30 years, before the people secured Household Suffrage, and they only secured it in 1867 because the classes feared a revolution. And out of nine Parliaments elected from 1832 to 1865 the Liberals had a majority in eight, and the people eventually secured the franchise by a coalition of Radicals and Tories, headed by the late Lord Beaconsfield. It was conceded to dish the Liberals and from fear of the people not from sincere conviction. The Liberals in 1867 had a majority of 67, and they were unable to pass a Franchise Bill, and the people are gulled to-day into the belief that the Liberals gave the franchise."

C. A. Vince, M.A., in his Life of the Late John Bright, says: "The statesmen of the Liberal Party still were scarcely less disinclined to reform than their Conservative competitors. Both parties regarded reform as an inevitable event of the future; both were anxious not to anticipate the necessity; yet both were eager to intercept the credit of being the first to yield to the popular will so soon as it should become obviously irresistible."

Were it necessary to prove the healthy fear entertained for the results of possible mass action at all times by the ruling class it would only be necessary to detail the history of the Franchise struggle, to relate the facts of Liberal and Tory hypocrisy from 1832 to 1867. One might refer to the Home Rule agitation and circumstances under which the Free State was by law established in order to dish the Irish Republic. But the facts are so well known and the deduction so

obvious that citation and comment become an insult to the readers' knowledge and intelligence.

Parliamentarism cannot solve, and does not seek to solve, the only problem that matters, the key problem of all social misery, the problem of class society, its transformation into true, equal, or free society. Its aim is to perpetuate Imperialist or exploiting society. It is a legacy of Roman Imperialism, a remnant of the Roman code. It registers no progress. One quotation will prove this fact beyond all contradiction. Tiberius Gracchus flourished B.C. 102–133. He was a social reformer, seeking to reform the lot of the people, never wishing to overthrow the Empire. He gave his life for his poor measures of reformism. He described the lot of the Roman soldiers in these words: "Without houses, without any settled habitations, the disbanded militia wander from place to place with their wives and children; and the generals do but mock them when, at the head of their armies, they exhort their men to fight for their sepulchres and die for domestic household divinities . . . The private soldiers fight and die to advance the wealth and luxury of the great; and they are called masters of the world, while they have not a foot of ground in their possession." Is it such a far cry from B.C. 133 to A.D. 1923? Can we say that these words have lost any of their force, that they no longer apply? Is it not time we proved them false for all future generations? Will Parliamentarism aid us in this struggle?

The House of Commons, as the folks-chamber, is composed of a Speaker, clerks, doorkeepers, waiters, reporters, and a few silent members. That is to say, these persons are the necessary requisites, in or about the Commons, to set off the glory of the conspicuous characteristic of the Chamber — the vapid and unprofitable chatter of the expectant placeman. This gentleman is an inevitable result of, and necessary adjunct to, the political machine which reflexes the principles and policy of a system which produces for private gain. He is quite conspicuous on the Labour benches, a rigorous attender of the House, always ready to interpose in a debate, persistent in his efforts to make a mark and prove his fitness for office, his heart bleeding for labour and his discretion pandering to the Stock Exchange gilt-edged fraternity, and his imagination conjuring up the great ghosts of the traditional mighty dead of the Mother of the Parliaments who were lying, deceiving swashbucklers in real life, as the records of the Chartists and the biography of Lord Shaftesbury will show. Is it not obvious that the entire career of a man of this type, and his name is Legion, for he is the future Labour Government, the present Labour Opposition, is founded on an ambition that denotes him to be a hireling of law and order, a traitor to the working-class, who never can and never will seek to emancipate his class. Such is Parliamentarism ! Whoso wishes to remain a slave and considers his role a honorable one, whoso wishes to perpetuate slums and inequalities, banquets and famine, hovels and palaces, a disordered

whole ironically termed civilised society, will support it. Whoso believes that the workers can pursue a better and braver path to a real goal and a truer end will reject it. They will desert Parliamentarism for what must be when one does not parley: the social struggle, and all that that struggle means. They will stand for Socialism, the social upheaval, as distinct from Capitalism, the Parliamentary revision. Thus, will they solve the problem of class struggle and so inaugurate the Social Revolution, the Workers' Industrial Republic.

Appendix. Labour Party Facts.

John S. Clarke, who in the course of a varied political career, has come, via the Third International and much Marxian-Lenin reading, back to the fold of reformism and Labour-fakerism, wrote in his "Cigarette Papers" in the Worker for November 5th, 1922, as follows: "Yes! if anything on God's earth is calculated to prolong the capitalist system, it is surely a Labour Government."

The facts establish the unquestionable truth of this assertion, whatever Clarke's present interests may inspire him to write. Those facts emphasise the unanswerable character of the Anti-Parliamentarians' logic, a logic not of schools, but of everyday experience and grim sordid reality.

Consider the facts.

At Princess Mary's wedding on February 280, 1922, at Westminster Abbey, among 2,000 selected persons admitted to the Abbey were:

Mr. J. H. Thomas, M.P., and Mrs. Thomas. Mr. J. R. Clynes, M.P., and Mrs. Clynes. Mr. C. W.Bowerman, M.P., and Mrs. Bowerman. Mr. Harry Gosling, now M.P. for Whitechapel.

When the King and Queen dined with Viscount and Viscountess Astor at Lord Astor's residence, No. 4, St. James's Square, on Thursday, March 8th, 1923, the guests included several prominent Labour members and their wives.

Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Thomas were there, Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Clynes, and Mr. and Mrs. Philip Snowden.

Members of all political parties were represented, and those received by Lady Astor besides the Royal entourage included: The United States Ambassador, the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George and Dame Margaret Lloyd George, the Speaker and Mrs. Whitley, the Marquis and Marchioness of Salisbury, the Earl of Balfour, Lady Frances Balfour, Lord and Lady Eustace Percy, the Earl and Countess of Kerry, Viscount and Viscountess Milner, Viscount and Viscountess Grey of Fallodon, Lord and Lady Islington, Lord Robert Cecil, Sir John and Lady Simon, and the High Commissioner for Canada.

The Queen wore a dress of eau de nil with diamond ornament, and Viscountess Astor a dress of old gold with diamond ornaments, including a very fine tiara.

Next morning the press was able to announce that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald (Leader of the Labour Opposition) had accepted an invitation to dine with the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace on the Thursday following.

I have said that a Labour Government is pledged to maintain Capitalism. Is that true?

J. R. Clynes, the Deputy-Leader of the Labour Party, speaking the last week in January, 1922, before the Imperial Commercial Association, at the Cannon Street Hotel, London, found himself in the congenial company of Lord Balfour of Burleigh, Sir Lynden Macassey, Lord Ashfield, and the chairmen of several banks and commercial trading associations. He insisted that the Labour Party tried to compose and not to extend or aggravate trade disputes. He added, apparently with heat: "A great deal of nonsense is talked about the designs of Labour upon private enterprise. It is not Labour that has imposed upon it a tax of 6s. in the £, rising in some cases to double that amount. Private enterprise has to carry a heavy load of rates, payments and interests. and none of these could be worse under any condition of Labour authority. Labour will be as considerate as any other Government in composing claims as they arise between public well-being and private gain."

A week later Clynes spoke at Berkhampstead, the actual date being Saturday, February 4th, in reply to Lord Birkenhead. Repudiating the then Lord Chancellor's strictures on the Labour Party, the Deputy-Leader of the Labour Party said: "Industrial, troubles since the war had often been composed and prevented by the political Labour Party, and never in any instance provoked by it. Their service had been a service of restraint and a sustained appeal for patience which was nearly exhausted. The political policy of the Labour Party, he claimed, would have reduced or prevented many of the industrial upheavals which the country had suffered."

Fourteen days later John Bull publishes from the pen of Mr. J. R. Clynes his article on "How Labour Would Govern." In this he states that "no rash innovations " would be introduced by him and his Party." Some are alarmed by the cry that the Labour Party would be pushed and terrorised by extremists, and would be unable to carry out a policy of its own . . . How preposterous such a fear is! . . . Precedent has already, been established in the matter of bringing from outside the service of great organisers and business men whose value to the State everyone must recognise . . . If in any elected majority men were not included who possessed the required legal standing the attractions of the positions would evoke many offers of service."

The Daily Herald for 22nd October, 1921, gave the following account of conditions in New South Wales under the Labour premiership of Mr. Dooley: "Mr. Dooley quotes statistics to show the remarkable progress of N.S.W. under Labour rule. Comparing the seventeen months under the Labour administration with the eighteen months under Nationalist regime, he says 972 new factories have been built as against 577. 988 new companies, with a capital of £72,000,000 have been formed, as against 498, with a capital of £18,000,000, additional capital has been invested in existing companies to the amount of , £18,747,330, and the bank deposits have swoIlen to £155,000,000, an increase of £10,000,000."

The Rt. Hon. John Hodge, M.P., in January, 1922, addressed the Gorton Trades' Council. He said: "What is required at the present time is more unanimity between capital and labour."

He was questioned concerning the oath that he, a Labour member, had taken on becoming a Privy Councillor. That oath is as follows: "I do swear by Almighty God to be a true and faithful servant unto the King's Majesty, as one of his Majesty's Privy Council. I will not know or understand of any manner of thing to be attempted against His Majesty's Person, Honour, Crown, or Dignity Royal, but I will let and withstand the same to the uttermost of my Power, and either cause it to be revealed to His Majesty Himself, or to such of His Privy Council, as shall advertise His Majesty of the same. I will in all things to be moved, treated, and debated in Council, faithfully and truly declare my mind and opinion, according to my Heart and Conscience, and will keep secret all matter committed and revealed unto me, or that shall be treated of secretly in Council. And if any of the said Treaties or Councils shall touch any of the Counsellers, I will not reveal it unto him, but will keep the same until such time as, by the Consent of His Majesty, or of the, Counsel, Publication shall be made thereof. I will to my uttermost bear faith and allegiance unto the King's Majesty, and will assist and defend all jurisdictions, pre-eminences and Authorities, granted to His Majesty, and annexed to the Crown by Acts of Parliament, or otherwise, against all Foreign Princes Persons, Prelates, States, or Potentates. And generally in all things I will do as a faithful and true Servant ought to do to His Majesty. So help me God."

Hodge explained: "The reason for taking the Privy Councillorship was that it was compulsory on becoming a Crown Minister. "

The following questions were put to him and answered as follows:

Q. Are you, if re-elected to Parliament, prepared to support the Government in bringing out the White Guards against strikers, as you did during the boiler-maker's strike in Liverpool?"

A. Yes.

Q. "If the Labour Party is elected in a majority to Parliament, have they any policy by which they hope to solve the unemployment problem?"

A. "No! we will have to play ca-canny until we find our feet."

I extract from the Glasgow Herald for 15th February, 1922, an item from the meeting of the Glasgow Magistrates at which Bailie Dollan was present: "As the duty of making arrangements in connection with executions in Glasgow Prison devolves on the Magistrates, they have remitted to the two junior Magistrates — Bailie Black and Bailie George Smith — to see to the carrying out of the death sentence pronounced on William Harkness and his wife. The executions are fixed for Thursday next."

Like Bailie Dollan, Bailie George Smith is a Labour man — a member of the I.L.P. ‼

Finally, since their return as Members for the Eastern Divisions of Glasgow, we have had started by John Wheatley, on behalf of himself and Maxton, the Glasgow Eastern Standard. I have the second issue (dated March 10th, 1923) before me as I write. A more vulgarly capitalist effort has never been produced by a man who owes his circulation to the blind and stupid support of a sincere and trusting, but grossly abused and much deceived working-class. There is not a word of Socialism, not a note of culture in the whole vulgar sheet. It is edited on Wheatley's behalf by McCrea, the ex-school teacher and member of the I.L.P., who was returned to the Town Council for Shettleston as a Labour man. Its banalities include (apparently) a weekly portrait gallery of "Prominent Business Men." What a theme for a Labour M.P.'s paper! The celebrity chosen for March 10th is one Armstrong, who seems to have made his fortune out of the credit drapery business. Wheatley's class conscious journal tells us of this Anti-Socialist, beneath a well-printed half-tone block

"Ex-Councillor Matthew Armstrong is our prominent man this week. Born in the East End fifty-six years ago, he early entered the drapery trade, and has now built up one of the largest businesses of its kind in the city. His premises, as a wholesale warehouseman, and manufacturer of all kinds of garments, in Great Hamilton Street, are a monument to his efficiency and business acumen. He is a pillar of the 'Auld Kirk,' and his recreations are bowling and golf."

Postscript: As I pass these page proofs (April 10th, 1923), I notice that, when the Anti-Socialists introduced a Bill into the Commons last week for forcibly closing Communist and Socialist Sunday Schools the Labour Party acquiesced. The London correspondent of the Glasgow Herald declares that this Bill was discussed at a meeting of the Labour Party and it was decided to let it pass without a division. "Mr. Ramsay Macdonald stated that if the Bill was an attack on the Labour Party, the Party must vote against it, but if it were aimed against the Communists, it was not a matter that concerned them."

If this Capitalist journalist is incorrect perhaps the Labour Party will explain its attitude towards this Tory Sedition Bill that has only one object — to menace

and hinder working-class emancipation, whilst Boy Scouts and Girl Guides organisations capture and corrupt the child-mind in the interests of Imperialism and Class-society.

Guy A. Aldred
Socialism and Parliament
1923

This is the full text of the first version of Aldred's Socialism & Parliament published by The Bakunin Press (London & Glasgow) in 1923. Aldred published revised and expanded versions of this pamphlet in 1926, 1934 and 1942.
Anarchy is Order CD