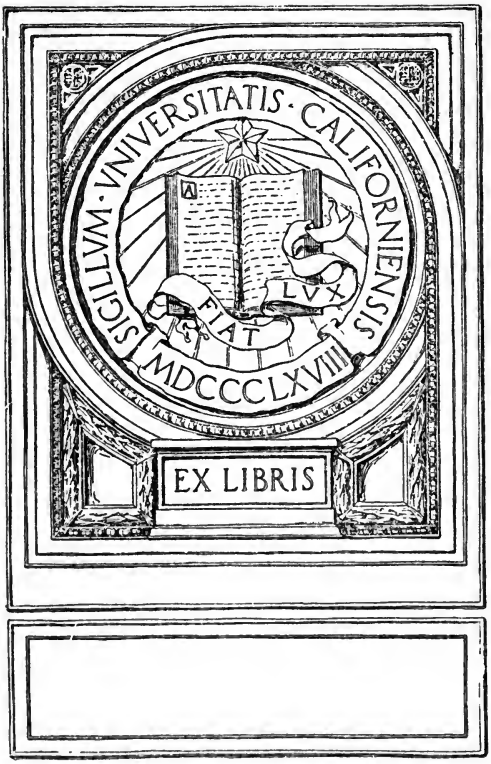
# THE COMING FORCE

## THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

BY

FRANK H. ROSE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## THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

BY

FRANK H. ROSE

INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY
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SALFORD, MANCHESTER
1909

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Socialism and Trade Unionism are commonly regarded as distinct factors of modern industrial and social progress. A man may be both, it is true, but he is assumed to be under the obligation if not the necessity of sustaining a certain duality of idea and motive. We commonly refer to the Trade Union and the Socialist sections of a political party which represents both sections and endeavours to interpret two distinct ideas by a single public policy. That, subject to certain real or assumed reservations, there is a common interest and a common motive is conclusively established. How broad is the basis of agreement and how small and inconsequent are the points of disagreement it is my purpose to show.

Modern Trade Unionism presents a spectacle of astounding futility except in those departments of effort which have been inspired by Socialism. Even in those, the leaven of the old thrift-promoting fallacies has beggared the movement of possible good results. Except for the coherence and forward direction that the growing Socialistic tendencies have given it, the Trade Union world is a mass of cross purposes, personal intrigue and overlapping. The integral parts of the Trade Union Movement have been drifting further apart with the rapid development of sectionalism. Even in its chosen domain of fighting for trumpery

betterment under the brutal wage system which it has blindly accepted as the embodiment of justice, it has never been able to work in unison. Its poverty-stricken ideals, its sordid ambitions, its feeble conception of the possibilities that lie within its reach, its passive acceptance of a false and fraudulent economy as the determinant of all its efforts are not the least of its faults.

Think of the splendid wealth it wastes, the magnificence of the resources it dares not utilise, the intricate yet powerful machinery it misuses, and the colossal energy it devotes to the doing of nothing.

Naysmith's steam-hammer can crush a steel bar. It can also be so exquisitely modulated that it will crack a nut without injuring the kernel. It is a wonderful and beautiful thought. Still, the man who bought a steam-hammer for the special purpose of cracking nuts would not explain away his folly by reminding his critics that the steam-hammer was a capable instrument for the purpose of nut-cracking. The obvious suggestion would be that a man is a fool to use a steam-hammer to perform an operation which could be more competently performed with his teeth. But what are we to say of the man who, having steel bars to break as well as nuts to crack, perversely uses the steam-hammer for the latter purpose and tries his teeth on the steel? Yet something very much like this is being attempted by the Trade Unionists.

To me the main difference between the Trade Unionist and the Socialist is not so much that the

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one has failed to recognise the fact of unjust conditions, but that the other has understood their character and cause. In the light of this understanding, he has set out to alter the conditions by the application of rational, if drastic, measures.

Whatever ultimate form or dimensions the Labour Movement may assume, it seems abundantly clear that the materials which go to its building must be such elements of working-class organisation as presently exist. The old Trade Unionism is, and must be, the main source of supply, and it must be rendered plastic: first, by the elimination of the old hardening prejudices, and, secondly, by the steady infusion of higher ideals.

It would be possible, though not easy, to trace the ancestry of the Labour Movement back to the penumbra of time. But its descent is far from direct, and there are vast spaces which historical record has jumped without leaving a footprint; much that lies buried in the débris of the ages or has been swept away by the bloody torrents of war and revolution.

I do not propose to ransack the smirched pages of antiquity for either facts or analogies. I am chiefly concerned with the presentation of a bold and consistent outline of the origin, causes and development of a movement which gives higher promise of great results than has any previous revolt of the workers against the thrall of the governing classes.

# THE COMING FORCE.

## I.

## ORIGINS.

THIRTY years ago, George Howell wrote "The Conflicts of Capital and Labour," and with much pains and elaboration demonstrated that the modern Trade Union is the lineal descendant of the mediæval Craft Gilds. More recently, Sidney and Beatrice Webb have given us a very learned and instructive "History of Trade Unionism," some portion of which is devoted to the superfluous purpose of showing that Howell's theory is wrong. Such an inquiry is most interesting to the careful and earnest student, but to the average worker, it does not matter seriously.

Morrison Davidson's "Annals of Toil," which, Philistine that I am, I confess I like the best, gives me a much clearer conception of Trade Union origins.

Trade Unionism is a revolt against social wrong. It is inspired by a sense of injustice. There is no essential difference between the struggle of the Israelitish brick-makers against Pharaoh's task-masters and the strike of the Hemsworth colliers four thousand years after. From the first labour conflict of history to that which has just dragged out its course in hopeless weariness, the same

causes have operated. The servile wars of ancient Sicily, the bloody insurrections of the Roman helotry under Spartacus, the rising of the Jacquerie, the rebellion of the Kentish peasantry under Ball and Tyler, the frantic outbreaks of the Luddites, the Owenite Crusade of 1834, the mid-century struggles of the Chartists and the old Trade Unionists are all traceable to the same cause—an intolerable sense of injustice imposed or of right withheld.

Fill in the space as you will with such poor, vague traditions as pass for history, the deadly sameness of the story of Labour's struggle against Capitalism continues. Here are three quotations:

Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There is no straw given unto thy servants and they say to us, Make brick; and, behold, thy servants are beaten.—EXODUS v. 15-16.

* * * * *

The beasts of the field have their dens and their caves. To the men who fight and die for Rome their country grants nothing but the air and the light. Unsheltered and homeless they wander with their wives and children, and when the generals in battle call upon their soldiers to fight for the abodes of their gods and the graves of their fathers, it is a lie and a mockery; for of the mass of citizens none possess a domestic altar, none a grave to mark where his father lies; but they fight and they die to increase the wealth and extravagant luxury of others. Whilst they are called lords of the world they have not a clod to call their own.—TIBERIUS GRACCHUS to the Romans, B.C. 133.

* * * * *

Our employers are reputed to rank amongst the wealthiest coalowners of the country, and are demanding reductions of wages which the employees, by individual ballot, unanimously rejected, and which terms the Y.M.A. leaders

when consulting the men could not recommend. The employers being unable to subdue the ardour of our men resorted to the barbarous and unchristian method of evicting our women and children into the streets to die of starvation or hunger, and who at this moment are mainly existing on bread and fat as their principal diet. Fellow comrades and friends, can you any longer see human creatures existing under such unnatural conditions practically without food, fire, and raiment? On behalf of 3,000 suffering people we earnestly appeal for help, and urge upon you the necessity to render us all possible financial assistance, for which we shall ever feel grateful.—HEMSWORTH LOCKOUT MANIFESTO, November, 1906.

To me, the story of Labour can but be pieced up from vague traditions and uncertain records. The long and dreary path of the toiler is the same through the ages. Its periods are marked and its miles are spaced out by the whipping-post, the prison, and the gibbet. Wherever Labour has turned to bay the cause of the final exasperation is always the same. The weapons of industrial warfare may differ; the *causus belli*, never. The fear-compelling wonders of Aaron's rod, the sword of the Thracian gladiator, the wrecking club and torch of the Luddite, the rattening devices of the industrial hooliganism of the "'fifties," the strike, the picket, the boycott, are the implements that have fallen into the hands of men whom the same despair and indignation have driven into revolt at different times.

All have proved useless; the weapons of the modern Trade Union the most useless. They injure more friends than foes; their recoil is more damaging than their fire. Yet, whatever the fate or the fortune that has followed their use, the

impulse that prompts the worker to adopt them is that resentment which follows the conception of wrong and injustice. The Webbs in their excellent "History of Trade Unionism" have fairly expressed this idea. "*To the great majority of Trade Unionists the theories of the leaders at either date* (1833-4, 1889-90) *did but embody a vague aspiration after a more equitable social order.*" The same thought arises from a consideration of any Labour movement at any period.

In essence, Socialism does not differ from Trade Unionism. It is an aspiration to achieve the same end—"a more equitable social order." Trade Unionism and Socialism have therefore a common origin in their revolt against social inequality; a common object in social readjustment. It follows then that a common method must be adopted.

There is no need to minutely examine the genesis of Trade Unionism here. For our purpose it is immaterial whether the Unions are a modern development of the Mediæval Gilds or not. A close investigation of the early incidents of the Trade Union Movement will not help us appreciably. The central fact is that workers found themselves surrounded by conditions that were intolerable and cruel. The impossibility of combating those evils by individual effort quickened the instinct of human association, and men sought to oppose a common enemy and a common wrong by collective action. We might with perfect truth give this as an explanation of the advent of the Labour Party.

With some small modifications the Trade Unionism of the present time is the direct development of the Trade Unionism of the middle of last century. It is clear that the movement was affected by the experiences of twenty years before. The gloomy failure of the Owenite Trades Union must have been in the minds of the organisers and founders of the great Amalgamated Unions. Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union had aimed at the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth without the interference of the State, indeed, in the teeth of a hostile State. The attempt to bring about an ideal condition of things by no better agencies than the strike and the boycott had ended in defeat. Most of the men whom we affectionately regard as the fathers of our great existing orders were men old enough to remember the Owenite fiasco. It is not remarkable that their own efforts constituted a compromise between the Socialistic ideals* of the Grand National and the "practical" principles of Manchesterism.

The adaptability of the British worker to collective methods had been abundantly demonstrated. The Grand National had reached a membership of half a million. Loose and incoherent as it appears to have been, it gave evidence that the evils of industrial life were at that time sufficiently provocative of revolt to bring into association vast numbers of workers who considered themselves the victims of those evils.

* See Appendix I.

The idea of continuing the revolt against the same evils though by less ambitious methods, is the outstanding idea of the unionism of the "'fifties." Let us understand the Owenite scheme. The following quotation is from a speech by Robert Owen himself:—

> I will now give you a short outline of the great changes which are in contemplation and which shall come suddenly upon society like a thief in the night. . . . It is intended that national arrangements shall be formed to include all the working classes in the great organisation and that each department shall become acquainted with what is going on in other departments that all individual competition is to cease; that all manufactures are to be carried on by national companies. All trades shall first form associations for carrying on the business; all individuals of the specific class shall become members.—ROBERT OWEN, October 6th, 1833.

The idea of interpreting Socialism into accomplished fact by the agency of Trade Unionism is therefore not new. With the obvious fallacies of this particular scheme we need not concern ourselves at present. It is sufficient to say that the enterprise, extravagant as it was considering the then state of society, was regarded as feasible by hundreds of thousands of the workers. The project terrified the classes, as witness the clamour of the contemporary press.

As an immediate result, the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was formed of men and women of all trades, co-operative productive undertakings were promoted all over the country, and over 500,000 members were enrolled. Owen's own boastful declaration that it "should come like a thief in the night" was miserably falsified. It

came like a shadow and as quickly passed away. For more than a decade Trade Unionism struggled for a bare survival. When it lifted its diminished head again it took a different line and assumed a different tone.

In the interval it is clear that the weight of evil social conditions was persistently pressing the workers into resistence. This is the manifest incentive to Labour action all the world over, through all the ages. The universal result has been associations of human beings who have made resistance to injustice a common cause and the rectification of wrong a common object. Sometimes there has been but an indistinct conception of the cause and the character of the wrong; more frequently but a halting notion of effective method. But every effort leaves its lesson and smooths the way for better efforts.

## II.

## A NOTE ON CHARTISM.

The Chartist agitation which began in 1834 and expired twenty years later marks a stage in the political development of the workers—and that is all. It is difficult to understand the latter-day eulogies which advanced writers and speakers have lavished upon the reckless and clamant agitators whose most earnest efforts were devoted to personal vituperation and mutual throat-cutting and whose final achievement may be truthfully expressed in a record empty of all but wasted talent and squandered opportunity. This may not be a popular view, but it is the view which a calm consideration of the fact impels.

The Grand National Consolidated and the Chartist Movement appear to have sprung from a common fount—the prevalent unrest and the vague but growing conceptions of wrong and injustice on the part of the masses who, in spite of the fraudulent Capitalistic Reform Act of 1832, were still railed off inexorably from the constitution. They had not even changed masters—they had but helped one set of social bullies to political power without acquiring any themselves.

It may seem extravagant, but it is a conceivable proposition, that Parliament under pre-Reform conditions was a better instrument for the workers than it has ever been since. While the elements of constitutional government were a monarch absolutely controlled by the landed aristocracy, a House of Peers exclusively manned by landowners, and a House of Commons practically appointed by the land-owning classes, there was always the possibility of such a government acting with relative fairness between two governed classes, both of which it loved—and hated—in an equal degree.

That this is not an unreasonable conjecture is shown by many instances in which the claims of the Capitalists for the abolition of the Elizabethan laws were rejected and some poor protection given to the workers against the vehement rapacity of their industrial over-lords. But with the coming of the Capitalists to political power the state which Professor Beesley described later on as that of being ground between the upper and nether mill-stones was set up, and the grinding has gone on merrily enough to this day.

The contemptuous jibe of the modern democrat, that our histories are nothing better than biographies of kings, priests, and courtesans, and that the story of the people, anywhere, at any time, has yet to be written, is unfortunately equally applicable to the story of Chartism. The sayings and doings of Jones, O'Brien, O'Conner, Lovett, and Cooper bulk largely in records of Chartism. The people, as usual, matter little, even to the pure-souled

democrat. The unseemly wrangles and intrigues of the heroes of Chartism stand out in ugly relief all through, and the cause itself becomes little better than a vehicle for their paltry ambitions and animosities.

Owenism died too young to enable us to realise what possibilities it would have developed. The genesis of both that movement and Chartism are almost exactly contemporary (1834). There is a striking resemblance between them in some respects, while they present as strong a contrast in others. Owenism aimed at social betterment by purely industrial method, while Chartism appears to have sought political means and to have had little inspiration beyond the desire for the acquisition of political power.

The vast superiority of the Owenites' ideal is indicated by their clearer conceptions and loftier motive. Their method was that of the "general strike," but their notion of the result of such action was that by its agency Capitalism would be extinguished and the productive implements placed under the permanent control of the people.

The Chartists as late as 1839, five years after the beginning of their agitation, resolved upon their celebrated "Sacred Month" or "general strike," "provided the Charter were not enacted by a given day." This idea of the general strike method is more clearly expressed in the resolution of the Chartist Convention held at Bolt Court, London, on July 10th, 1839, "That the House of Commons having refused to go into committee on the

prayer of the National Petition, it is in vain to expect redress from that House. It is therefore the opinion of the National Convention that the people should work no longer after the 12th of August next, unless the power of voting for Members of Parliament to protect their Labour is guaranteed them." The Owenites would have risked a general strike to gain a millennial state—Chartism would have squandered one to gain the ballot and manhood suffrage.

Morrison Davidson states the case with quite unconscious candour in his "Annals of Toil":—

A little previous to this event (the practical repeal of the Elizabethan Labour Law by the reformed Parliament) was formed the Working Men's Association. *Its leading object was the enfranchisement of the toiler.* A committee consisting in part of members of this body, and in part of Members of Parliament, was appointed to formulate the demand of the "masses." The net result of their labours was the famous "Six Points" of the People's Charter. These were:

(1) Universal Manhood Suffrage.
(2) Annual Parliaments.
(3) Vote by Ballot.
(4) No Property Qualification (for candidates).
(5) Payment of Members.
(6) Equal Voting Districts.

The story of the next twenty years is that of persecution, ostracism, outrage, and suppression; of sacrifice and devotion almost incredible to-day, and, unhappily, internecine strife and rancour that stand out in tragic contrast, and then—

Meanwhile, conventions as usual appeared and disappeared, resolved and dissolved, and accomplished nothing. A bitter feud between O'Conner and Jones had now broken out, and generally "Roman was to Roman more hateful than a foe." All the organs of democracy, and they were

then numerous enough, railed at each other weekly, and nearly every Chartist leader of note was charged with bad faith and general depravity. They wrangled over O'Conner's Land Company Scheme, over the reception of Kossuth, over Napoleon's *coup d'état*, over everything, small, great, and indifferent. . . . To lessen the expense, the faithful few gave up the office in which they had hitherto met, and by 1853 Chartism had practically ceased to be a factor in British politics. Some of its leading exponents fell away from the faith, some emigrated, others occupied themselves with educational work or became absorbed in bourgeois pursuits and interests. Its lights in the Press went out one after the other, and from 1854 to 1880 there was no national Labour movement in the country.

Much has been made of the Socialistic inspiration of the Chartist agitation. It is difficult to discover any real evidence to justify it. True it is that some of its prominent leaders, notably Jones and O'Brien, spoke in the light of clear conviction. The movement, in bulk, was limited to a programme that a modern middle-class Radical would reject as inadequate, if not reactionary. At one convention they passed a long resolution in favour of the nationalisation of the land, and this appears to have been their highest point of aspiration. Chartism was not an advance upon Owenism, but really marks a phase of comparative reaction.

The organised craft labour of the two decades occupied by the Chartist rising and decline never appears to have joined in the movement. During the later years, when Chartism was drifting out with the tide, the Unions were absorbed in a new movement, the objects of which were to bring into line the multitude of local and sectional trade clubs and to form them into the great and wealthy

amalgamations which now constitute the controlling elements of modern Trade Unionism.

Chartism itself accomplished nothing. It is a moot point as to whether its moral effects upon the workers were very considerable. Not a single point of the Charter was enacted for years (Mr. Forster's Ballot Act was not passed until 1872), and could hardly be said to be even indirectly prompted by an agency that had been defunct for more than two decades.

There is no evidence to show that it gave an impetus to, or even sowed the seeds of, modern Socialism in Britain. Whatever moral force it left behind seems only to have hardened and stiffened into political Radicalism. If such a result be excellent, then Chartists and Chartism deserve some of the eulogies which modern admirers have lavished upon them. After all, if the people must be fooled for ever, it is quite an inconsequent matter whether such an effect is produced by Coopers, O'Conners, and Joneses, or Gladstones, Brights, and Morleys.

The Webbs' final comment upon Chartism is worth repeating:—

> Made respectable by sincerity, devotion, and even heroism in the rank and file, it was disgraced by the fustian of its orators and the political and economic quackery of its pretentious and incompetent leaders, whose jealousies and intrigues finally brought it to nought.

"*Nought*" is the right word. Modern Socialists and Labour men are bidden to remember—and beware!

## III.

## THE TYPE OF THE OLD UNIONISM.

The Trade Unionism that began in the 'fifties is typified by the great amalgamated Unions in the engineering, textile, shipbuilding, and building trades. The most successful example is the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and it is fair to take this Union as the best illustration of the many organisations which constituted the only elements of national working-class effort for nearly twenty years.

It began its career on January 10th, 1851, with about 5,000 members. To-day it has 108,000 members, scattered throughout every English-speaking land, a fund of well-nigh two-thirds of a million pounds, and a record for industrial effort that no other existing organisation can surpass.

It is the outcome of the consolidation of numerous small sectional associations which had struggled hopelessly and ineffectually to maintain tolerable life conditions for men who were the highly skilled operatives in an industry whose development had already begun to change the current and direction of the world's activities. The moving spirits of its inauguration were men of high character and exceptional ability. The

general loyalty of its members has always been proverbial, and it has been fortunate, with few exceptions, to be able to claim the services of capable and conscientious officers and leaders. It is not probable that its founders imagined, in their most enthusiastic moments, that their project would assume such colossal dimensions. If they did, they must have contemplated very different results.

Fortunately, we have some indications of what they thought. The initiatory ritual at the admission of every new member consists of the candidates signing the membership roll and the reading by the presiding branch officer, of an address. This address was compiled by the original founders of the Society and has been unchanged throughout the fifty-eight years of the Society's existence. It is the key that unlocks the minds of men who have long been dead, and shows exactly the view of Trade Unionism they held in their day. It is interesting and valuable as showing exactly the nature of the compromise they proposed to effect between the Socialism of the Owenite school and the newer "be thrifty, industrious and starve" philosophy of the bourgeois economists.

Thus it begins:—

FELLOW WORKMAN,—You have expressed your desire to join our Society, which is composed entirely of working men, who are united for the purpose of protecting and advancing their own interests and those of their order. If union be important to any order of the community, it must be pre-eminently so to the working man, whose only property—his labour—is in constant danger of being depreciated in value by the *competitive struggles in society*.

What can be clearer than the thought which prompts the last sentence? It directly and explicity attributes the evils that assail the workman to the "competitive conditions of society." This, at least, is a reflex of the deeper Socialistic sentiment of the Owenites. The effect of "competitive struggles in society" is thus outlined:—

> The man who is able to exist by his toil is, after all, dependent upon what the merest breath of adversity may in a moment dispel. The time will come when he will be either working reduced hours or existing in compulsory idleness. The period of sickness will arrive when he will be unable by his toil to supply the wants of himself and his family. Old age will come creeping on, and then, with weakened intellect and diminished strength, the poorhouse is, in too many instances, the only refuge after a life of labour.

An admirably concise and comprehensive compendium this, of the evils of a competitive system. So far, the address might have been written by a declared Socialist. It tells us clearly that the evils of working life are unemployment, uncertainty, insecurity, helplessness to combat the ordinary incidents of to-day and to-morrow by individual action, indigent old age; and that these are caused by the *competitive struggles in society*.

Here, too, are the unmistakable evidences of that "vague aspiration after a more equitable social order," the recognition of injustice which has been the prompting cause of every Labour uprising since humanity began to suffer from the consequences of competition. But, from this point, the compromising spirit begins. The remedy prescribed shows how deeply the spirit

of the middle-class economy had effected these men.

Modern science (*science,* mark you!) teaches us, however, that by small contributions, regularly paid through life, the want of employment may be provided for, the bed of sickness soothed, and old age rendered comparatively comfortable, and that, by a judicious application of the funds so contributed, the woes of all are alleviated and joys of all increased by their being shared amongst the many by means of union.

The idea of thrift as a remedy for the evils resulting from the "competitive struggles in society" is still more clearly expressed.

Members should be regular in their payments and attendance at the Society's meetings, as they will thereby always secure to themselves the benefits to be derived from the funds.

But the following is the note which indicates most forcibly the policy these men had in mind. After some pious exhortations to cultivate the manly virtues, we are told—

To conduct ourselves in such a manner that employers, noticing our regular conduct, will be led to value our institution and inquire for our members when in want of workmen.

Clearly, then, the policy of the typical Trade Union is not to be violently aggressive. But what is to be the final achievement, the goal at which all this mighty association is directed?

If these instructions be strictly adhered to and union carried out with proper spirit and earnestness, our members will rise to a point of elevation they have never yet attained, and will, by co-operation, be entitled to enjoy a fair share of the fruits of their labour.

Though I am an ardent and earnest Socialist, I am proud of the men who compiled this farrago

of inconsistencies. I honour the insight and wisdom—yes, the wisdom—that gleams through the fog of the thing. For, I have regard to the times and conditions that prevailed. I can understand the difficulties and the perils that surrounded them and the daring character of the work to which they had set such resolute hands. I do not analyse this document which is regarded to this day with sincere reverence by Trade Unionists, with any thought of disrespect or contempt. It has been read and tacitly endorsed by the hundred and odd thousands of skilled workers who make up the gigantic army of organised engineers to-day and by the hundreds of thousands of men who have passed through the ranks during more than fifty years. And it stands, still unaltered, as the final and conclusive expression of Trade Union faith in the greatest association of skilled workers that the world has ever known. It is fair, I think, to take it as the expression of what we call the old Trade Unionism, the orthodox creed of the faithful amongst men. And it begins with a recognition of the fact of social injustice and attributes that injustice to social inequity.

I gather from this initiatory address that the intention of the projectors of the Union was to form an association of the highest skilled workers in the engineering industry; men of the best physique and character, and by emphasising the principle of thrift in the form of high contributions and liberal friendly benefits, to create a sort of industrial monopoly. Thus was the "vague

aspiration after a more equitable social order" to be satisfied.

Fifty years have brought the million-fingered machine, the eager thousands of Capitalism's hungering slaves, the torments of life intensified by the same "competitive struggles in society" that Allen and Newton saw as the first cause of the workers' woe and want in the old days. There has been no essential change in the years that have passed. Only it has come to pass that the evils have grotesquely outgrown the means of dealing with them. Now that this greatest and most wonderful of Unions stands with all its superb equipment, all its wealth of money and experienced wisdom, it remains powerless to save its people from the most elementary wrong or sustain their claim for the most elementary right.

This is no exaggeration. The sole defence of the old Trade Unionism is its money-bag; its only offensive weapon the cracked and crazy strike. Capitalism can afford to laugh at both.

It is no wonder that the old fallacies and the old prejudices linger. The men who bequeathed them to us were wise men by their lights and honourable and beloved by ours. If we be but as wise as they in our conception of the cause of wrong and our realisation that our opportunities are far less restricted than were theirs, we shall work in the light of something more than a "vague aspiration after a more equitable social order."

## IV.

## THE "MARKING TIME" ERA.

The development of the political instinct of the organised workers is less obscure from the beginning of the Amalgamated Unions. The line of advance seems direct enough, though its traces are not always uniformly vivid. Its accompanying element must be borne in mind if the position is to be understood.

First and most important was the revival of the old Trade Union belief that by the comprehensive industrial organisation of skilled tradesmen the strike could be made an effective instrument of betterment. Side by side with this faith was the influence of the plausible politicians of the Bright and Gladstone order and the glittering mendacities of the new *laissez-faire* economy. As long as their colossal impudence was unperceived such teachings were accepted as unanswerable and above examination or criticism.

In the mental fog that ensued we find the workers clinging to Bright in spite of his vehement and acrimonious hostility to factory legislation and swearing by Gladstone, unmoved by his betrayal of their interests in the case of the pernicious and

insulting Trade Union Act of 1871—a measure which constituted a direct negation of the simple and modest object of twenty years of strenuous agitation. The curiosity of this chapter of working-class history is that the current idea was not to use political power and influence for any higher purpose than that of securing complete facilities for the legal use of the strike. Beyond this there is not the smallest trace of a political policy. There is no trace of an ideal higher than a "Nine Hours Working Day" and two shillings advance in wages, and this for the "aristocracy of labour"—the skilled craftsmen. This cheap-jack millennium is to be expedited by the strike, and, because the law imposes obstacles to the strike, the legislature must be moved from outside—never from inside—to remove them. There is no vestige of evidence of the existence of anything higher than this for many years. The whole of the political efforts of organised labour until the passage of Mr. Cross's Amendment Act of 1876 were concentrated upon this one object.

There is not a solitary trace of any thought in the direction of the political organisation of the workers indicated in the actions or utterances of the leaders. The general notion of direct Labour representation in Parliament appears to be expressed in "Send *me* to Parliament." Once there, those who had capacity to justify ambition as well as those who had merely ambition, seem to have been absorbed in the congenial occupation of edging towards the Treasury Bench. That only two of them got there

is perhaps the best commendation to be offered to the remainder. From the Parliamentary advent of Burt and McDonald until 1900 only twenty-two men who could, by some stretch of the imagination and not a little easy forgetfulness of political antecedents, be termed Labour representatives, were returned. That some strain must have been put upon the most elastic imagination is shown by the "official" list which includes such names as those of H. Broadhurst, W. Cremer, F. Maddison, G. Howell, J. Leicester, and J. Rowlands.

There is no intention here of elaborating the personal records of these uninteresting persons. Most of them clung, with affectionate tenacity, to the worker as long as he was of any use to them, and, with affable alacrity, got off his back when he could carry them no further.

The idea of some sort of National Association of the workers for some undefined form of political action seems to have cropped up with the institution of the Trade Union Congress. But wherever this idea lifted itself into expression the Liberal manipulators set to work to suppress it. The formation of an Independent Labour Party in Parliament was never seriously considered until the close of last century, though the germinal thought was always struggling for outgrowth. The custom, which seems to have begun about 1867, of convening great national representative gatherings of workers opened up a medium for the ventilation of questions of common interests, and it is only from the records of these meetings that we can gather

any reliable data in the light of which we can trace the growth of the political aspiration of organised Labour.

There was a "Trades Conference" convened in St. Martin's Hall by the London Working Men's Association in March, 1867. It was called to consider "the present state of trade societies consequent upon the recent judgment in the Court of Queen's Bench, and the Royal Commission then appointed to inquire into Trade Unions." The account of the proceedings bears out in every particular the statement that the political outlook of the Trade Unionist of that day was restricted entirely to agitation to obtain strike powers. It is probable that the regular Congress sprung from this or some similar meeting at that time.

There is no extant record of the first Congress, but at the second, held at Birmingham in 1869, the question of Labour Representation was raised. The following suggestive extract is taken from the report of the proceedings.

Working Men Members of Parliament.

An address on this subject from the Chelsea Working Men's Association was taken as read. In it it was suggested that a great National Industrial Party should be formed, and that a conference should be held either in London or Birmingham in November or December (1869). Mr. Alfred A. Walton (Brecon) read a paper on "Direct Labour Representation in Parliament." The writer commented on the fact that the present session of the Reformed Parliament had been allowed to pass away without a single member having suggested an inquiry as to why *more than a million and a half of working men were in a state of compulsory idleness in England.* That was an unmistakable proof of the want of sympathy in the House for the wants of the

working classes. Skilled workmen were fleeing away from poverty and starvation at the rate of a thousand a day from the port of Liverpool alone, and not a single working man had yet been permitted to enter Parliament. The working men must unite to form a working man's party, and in all future elections where two Liberal candidates were to be elected they must insist upon nominating one, allowing the middle classes to nominate the other. If the working classes always surrendered themselves to the delusive and deceptive cry, "Don't divide the Liberal interest!" they would be lost beyond redemption. Speaking of Conservative working men, he always thought that friends of that man, if there were any, should look after him as soon as possible, for a *Conservative working man was not capable of taking care of himself.*

Mr. G. Howell, at the same Congress, read a paper, written by Mr. R. M. Latham, President of the Labour Representation League, and the redoubtable George Odger moved:—

That this Congress endorses the papers of Messrs. Harry, Walton, and Latham as containing sentiments thoroughly in accordance with the wants and wishes of working men, and the Congress recommend their constituents and working men generally to support the Labour Representation League to obtain the return of actual working men to the House of Commons.

It is only necessary to record one utterance of the once great George Howell in order to emphasise the fact that the Trade Union Congress was born in an atmosphere of quickening political thought. Speaking at a public meeting during the Birmingham Congress week, he said:—

A great number of Trade Unionists were never tired of asserting with their opponents that the members of societies should not associate their membership with politics. He, however, must frankly admit that he was in favour of Trade Unions taking up politics, for he felt that in proportion as they took up politics, so would they progress. It was now

about ten years ago when they first adopted politics, and during that period they had made more progress than during any previous ten years. He therefore entreated the Trade Unionists of Birmingham, and of the country all over, to associate themselves together for political purposes. He did not wish to turn the societies from their original purposes, but he wished that they should associate with those objects political power and political influence. As showing the numerical power of Trade Unions, he mentioned twenty societies whose members numbered 223,456, and if that quarter of a million men made an earnest and vigorous effort in politics, what would be their weight throughout the length and breadth of the land? If working men only knew how to bring their power into a focus, Trade Unions would occupy a much higher position.

Clearly, there was the material for the beginning of a great Independent Labour Party had there been minds to direct and hands to mould it into even the crudest shape. The then existing Labour Representation Leagues and Working Men's Associations had instinctively turned to the great organised bodies for help to carry their theories into practice. It is impossible to escape the reflection that had the old gang of Trade Union officials possessed amongst them any whole-hearted desire to fashion a serviceable instrument of working-class uplifting the time was then, of all times, since or before. The more closely we examine the political and industrial conditions of that time the more this fact impresses itself.

The workers had been forced into sharp contact with the Legislature. They had been insulted, ignored and belittled by Liberals and Tories alike all through a struggle, then waxing old, for the Repeal of the Combination Laws which illegalised

even their poor broken tool, the strike, and left their funds at the mercy of any scoundrel who cared to loot them. In the next four or five years they were to witness yet another vivid illustration of Liberal insincerity and to receive at the hands of the hated Tories the crowning glory of emancipation from legal suppression and industrial impotence.

But the prototypes of modern Liberal-Labour seem only to have been willing to foster the growing aspiration for real political power, while it led no further than the sanctuary of Liberalism. Not one of the "old brigade" leaders ever regarded the use of the Unions' power in the direction of making for a definitely organised political force as a possibility, and certainly not one of them ever attempted to cultivate such a project. We shall find them industriously side-tracking the movement every time it gave signs of being on the right line. The severest judgment that can be pronounced upon this phase of the National Labour Movement is that it engendered such a disfiguring excrescence of Liberal-Labourism.

## V.

## THE UNLEARNED LESSONS OF THE "*SEVENTIES.*"

THERE was no Congress in 1870, but the third met in London in 1871. Its absorbing topic was, naturally, the Trade Union Bill which Mr. Bruce had introduced into Parliament and which was "Liberally" vitiated by its association with the Criminal Law Amendment Act. If Labour Representation was one of the subjects it must have already deteriorated into one of negligible importance, for Howell, in his "Conflicts of Labour and Capital," does not include it in his account of the agenda—which, by the way, covered such questions as Mines Regulations, Truck, Weekly Wages, Convict Labour and Free Labour, Taxation (Imperial and local), Waste Lands, Unemployed Labour Emigration, and the International Fraternisation of Labour.

At the Nottingham Congress of 1872 the tender mercies of the Liberals came home with such startling force and vividness that one is left wondering that such a person as a Liberal working man survived the assault. Mr. Gladstone and his

henchman, Mr. Bruce, not only forced their hypocritical Trade Union Act through, but in spite of the protests of the defrauded workers, accepted a drastic amendment proposed by the House of Lords. Almost comical in its pathos is the sad comment of the Parliamentary Committee of the period.

> A division was taken in the House of Commons on Monday June 19th, when, to our regret, the Lords' amendment was carried by 147 as against 97, being a majority of 50, composed of Tory and Liberal capitalists. . . . We find it our duty to note that from 150 members of the leading centres of industry which we have selected, 101 are Liberals and 29 are Conservatives. The conclusion we leave to trade unionists—we only note the fact, but it is a curious indication of what we must expect from the manufacturing and trading classes. Let the organisations note this fact and compare it with the professions on the hustings when most of the men promised to vote for an honest Trade Union Bill.

Why this should be described by the Parliamentary Committee as *curious* it would be difficult to explain. What is curious is that the signatories to the report are George Howell, George Potter, Alex. McDonald, Joseph Leicester, and Lloyd Jones—all sturdy Liberals to the last in spite of it.

At Leeds, in 1873, the question of Labour Representation was squeezed into the background although a general election was imminent. A resolution expressive of a pious opinion favourable to Labour Representation, to be brought about by some unexplained process was moved by Mr. Walton. After a short discussion it was carried.

The next year (1874) brought a General Election, and the unexpected rout of the Liberals.

Little doubt need exist that this result was due to the workers' disgust of the recent nauseating dose of Liberalism they had been compelled to swallow. The Labour Representation League got fourteen candidates to the poll of whom only two, Messrs. Burt and McDonald, were successful. The trusted friends of the people allowed only four of the fourteen straight fights, the remainder were flattened out by the well-known process which happily has lost some of its original efficacy in our own time. The suggestion that the Labour Representation League is essentially an offshoot of the Trade Union Congress is nowhere borne out by evidence. It figured quite as a visitor at the second Congress of 1869, and never appears to have been a member of the family. That it was quite an alien in 1874 is clearly demonstrated by the Congress proceedings which took place on the eve of that year's momentous general election. The resolution in favour of forming a definite Parliamentary organisation was negatived in favour of an amendment expressing faith in "local effort," and finally the following wise and prudent course was decided upon:—

> That in the opinion of this Congress it is unwise and undesirable to pledge itself to any course of action in respect to Labour Representation in Parliament, and that each representative be at liberty to take what action he thinks proper in the town or city in which he resides.

However dull were the perceptions of the workers and their valued leaders in Congress their employers had gripped the situation very vigorously. The Parliamentary Committee of the year

issued, as a supplement to their report, the manifesto of the Employers' Federation (a lengthy and interesting extract from which will be found in Appendix 2), commenting upon the ambitious character of the Trade Union leaders of the time. The employers remark that "This course of proceeding tends not only to secure the permanence of their social order but to gratify the not unnatural ambition of some of them to obtain seats in Parliament as advocates of the policy of the Unions. To supply the want which the preceding statement clearly indicates, to acquire Parliamentary influence which is indispensable if legislature is not to become restricted, are the peculiar objects of the National Federation of Employers."

What actually happened was, that while the question of Labour Representation degenerated into a Congressional hardy annual, the Capitalists set to work and did the things the workers were still content to talk about. During the Congress week of 1874 the usual demonstrations were held, and at one of them Mr. Henry Broadhurst made this notable pronouncement:—

> Under the existing system of representation the votes of the South cannot be recorded in the North, or *vice-versâ*, but that which can be done, and in elections is equally necessary, viz., money, can be transmitted with the greatest facility. Calculating the number of trade unionists at 1,000,000, a shilling levy would produce £50,000. If only one-half the number contributed, it would raise a fund of £25,000. If Labour Representation is worth anything, it is certainly worth paying for; and inasmuch as Imperial legislation effects no particular locality, it follows that an election for Parliament is of as much interest to the working

classes of the whole kingdom as to those where it is going on. Consequently it is the duty of all to render assistance and nurture to the field where those interests are being contested. If the next general election is to carry a dozen working men into the legislative chamber—more notorious for its massive gold bar than for its intellectual calibre—the Trade Unionists must commence in earnest to prepare the funds, without which all efforts will be wasted. *The time for talk has passed, the hour for work has arrived.*

This is the first recorded utterance of any recognised leader of the old school which expresses a bare outline or even a hint at procedure. Let it be borne in mind that in this there is not even a remote suggestion of a Labour Party on independent lines even as vague as the first resolution of 1869. Mr. Broadhurst stood for Wycombe in 1874 and was unsuccessful. He was returned in 1880, and his subsequent Parliamentary career gives a sufficient answer to any queries which may arise in the minds of intelligent students—either of politics or our common human nature. At least, to be just, we must thank Mr. Broadhurst for telling us that if Labour representation is worth anything it is certainly worth paying for, and for demonstrating the potentialities of a shilling a year which the Trade Unionist of these enlightened days pays with such manifest grudging, while he gaily gambles millions on "thousand-to-one" industrial chances, and never seems to be disheartened though he loses every time.

At the seventh Congress, held at Liverpool in 1875, the Labour Representation question, its discussions and resolutions, occupy only ten lines in the report. Everybody agrees with the principle

from this forward and nobody does anything. Mr. Broadhurst moved:—

> That in the opinion of this Congress it is the duty of the Trade Unionists and other bodies of working men to miss no opportunity of returning to Parliament men of their own order, and for this purpose recommends the delegates present to form committees in their respective towns.

This was carried unanimously.

In October of the same year the eighth Congress was convened at Glasgow. The piety of the British workman's opinion had evidently intensified during the intervening months. The resolution of the previous year was reproduced with this qualification—that instead of it being merely the *duty* of Trade Unionists, etc., the resolution now declared it to be the *imperative duty*, and when a Glasgow delegate moved an amendment to the effect that Congress pledges itself to support only those candidates who are *prepared to do justice to all classes*, he was loudly derided, and Congress passed its highly progressive resolution with only five dissentients.

It will be observed that in the matter of passing resolutions the traditional capacity of the Trade Union Congress was already established. More recent experiences have shown that like Parliament it will do something when it is sufficiently kicked. In 1875 there was evidently nobody prepared to kick it.

A great stride, at least in phraseology, marks the resolution presented at Newcastle in 1876. The worker is quite resolved and almost defiant—his

fears have dissolved in long familiarity with the question of Labour Representation. By 73 votes to 9 it was nobly decided—

That this Congress, recognising the importance of the Representation of Labour in Parliament, calls upon Trade Unionists and other bodies of workmen to take every opportunity of returning to Parliament men of their own order, and considers it to be the imperative duty of delegates present to make a decided stand by forming committees or associations in their respective districts to carry out the same.

The reforming zeal of the Congress and its engineers impelled them at Leicester in the following year to declare that—

Recognising the necessity of Labour being efficiently represented in Parliament, this Congress calls upon all Trade Unionists to do the utmost in their power to return competent men of their own class to Parliament. Likewise to agitate as far as is possible for the obtainment of manhood suffrage as the basis of representation.

Finding that this revolutionary declaration had neither provoked the deluge nor caused the heavens to fall, the Bristol Congress of 1878 repeated and unanimously carried the Leicester resolution without amending a word.

## VI.

## THE COMING OF LIBERAL-LABOURISM.

The Edinburgh Congress of 1879 made the extraordinary discovery that "It is high time that the claims of Labour are properly represented in Parliament," but still laid stress on the necessity for having competent men of their own class as representatives. There is no reason to suppose, however, that this repeated insistence upon "competent men" is intended as an invidious reflection upon the two miners' advocates already safely seated, but rather as an inferential tribute to others who are prominent and anxious aspirants.

A significant fact concerning the last two years is the absence of any prominent speakers to the resolutions on Labour Representation. A very reasonable assumption is that the Parliamentary Committee did not feel particularly enthusiastic about it.

With Mr. Broadhurst's return in 1880 begins the pitiful and undignified scrambling of the political mud-larks of Liberal-Labourism. It is customary to give these curious amphibians some credit as pioneers of the political Labour Movement and to trace the direct line of progress from

them. It is possible to trace it *through* them, perhaps, and to arrive at the conclusion that the Labour Party, far from being a consequence, is a reality achieved in spite of them. Messrs. Burt and McDonald, though candidates of the '74 election, were first of all miners' representatives, principally pledged to reforms of Mines Regulation Acts and to promote interests more special to the mining communities than those which were general to the working classes. Their Parliamentary work did at least demonstrate in a very practical way the advantages of Labour Representation, which is rather more than can be said of most of their later associates.

During the decade 1868-1878, the first ten years of the Trade Union Congress, there were tolerably clear indications that the political ambitions of the organised workers weakened very considerably. For one reason, the recognised leaders never seem to have stimulated it very energetically. They were all, or nearly all, orthodox Liberals, and not one of them appears to have possessed a political ideal that led beyond tinkering with Factory Acts and keeping the right to strike inviolable.

George Howell's "Conflicts of Capital and Labour" appeared in 1878, and its concluding paragraph sufficiently explains the Trade Union ideal of the period, expressed by a man who was all through a perfectly typical example of this order.

> But it is not in Parliamentary and public work alone that Trade Unions must seek for advantage and triumphs; their

funds may be used to provide *better homes for their members*. If judiciously managed, thousands of them could be assisted in purchasing their own dwellings and in obtaining the best goods at the lowest market prices. In the past there has been a waste of energy and wealth; in the future this can be utilised under their own management and in their own way just as they have done in the case of sickness, accident, out-of-work, and other benefits. They have also opportunities of conferring advantages on their own members in other directions, such as sending some of their best craftsmen to the several exhibitions to study the productions of their competitors in the industrial race. These men could collect statistics of trade, report on the styles of workmanship, the average capacity of the workers, the cost of materials, the wages, the hours of labour, price of food, habits of the workmen, and many matters of enduring interest to all classes. If this were done, the circle of their influence would be widened, their strength and importance increased, and their power to deal with Labour questions would be intensified and rendered more direct and permanent.

The workers' political paradise is bourgeois Radicalism; the climax of his social aspiration is to form building societies and collect industrial statistics of *enduring interest to all classes*. A still more cogent reason for the relapse than the dull imaginations of the politically tainted leadership must be noted here. In 1871 dying faith in the old "strike and starve" policy was quickened by the astonishing triumph of the Nine Hours Movement. To the young and ardent worker with a lofty contempt for mere palliatives and a wholehearted belief in some gospel of complete regeneration, the shortening of the hours of labour seems a little thing. It does not appeal to the average worker in so light a spirit. The middle-aged man who, from his childhood, has worked for more than ten hours a day for five days a week and nearly ten

hours on the sixth, release from labour at five o'clock every night and one o'clock on Saturdays is an approach to a new order of things. To gain, as the result of the application of orthodox and cherished method, not a thimbleful of sixpences that landlords and tradesmen can appropriate by the very fact of their being gained, but six golden hours of leisure at one stroke of the old weapon, naturally stimulated the conviction that the traditional Trade Union policy was, after all, the surest, safest, and most speedy.

By what process of reasoning could such convictions be attacked under the circumstances? The one unanswerable claim was at once set up—"We gained the nine hours by Trade Union effort—we can gain the eight hours by the same process." If there were in the minds of many men a clear-cut belief in political action, it must have met obstacles which were hardly present when the Congress was instituted and Parliamentary Representation became one of its burning topics. Hence it seems we have the slowing down of political thought in the Unions, evidenced by the perfunctory and haphazard discussions upon vague and unconstructive resolutions.

The stern unbending Liberalism of the leaders was perhaps the worst detriment of all. The pragmatical assumption that all men who are not Liberals are fools was brought to a climax at the Congress which immediately followed the passing of Mr. Cross's Amendment Act in 1875. A vote of thanks to the Home Secretary was actually

opposed on the ground that it was inexpedient to thank a Tory for doing what their Liberal gods had obstinately and insolently refused to do. So easily had these worthies swallowed the degrading indignity which Mr. Gladstone had offered them four years before. It never seems to have suggested itself to any one of them that they had nothing to thank either party for—that Gladstone's refusal to pass a satisfactory Trade Union Act was due to his middle-class prejudice against the workers, and that the amenable disposition of the Tories was not caused by any suddenly awakened love and sympathy for Trade Unionism, but only by a desire to perform the cheerful and congenial operation known as "dishing the Whigs." Well might the rank and file of the workers wonder whether it were the more blessed thing to receive Liberal kicks or Tory halfpence.

Every one of the leaders at that time who had Parliamentary aspirations was a Liberal in politics. The few who gained seats sat as Liberals without exception, and those who survive are Liberals to this day. Yet all of them had gone through the long and weary agitation for the reform of the Trade Union Laws and must have had full knowledge of Liberal benevolence—yet three of the Parliamentary Committee of 1872 who signed the Report quoted in the preceding chapter afterwards sat in Parliament as official Liberals. Unless their gratitude to Liberalism consisted exclusively of a lively sense of favours to come it is difficult to square the facts.

The advent of a few Liberal Trade Union officials into Parliament does not mark the beginning of Labour Representation—it does not even mark a step towards it. It is impossible to accept this brand of politician, whether we have regard to the original specimens or those who adorn the Liberal lobbies and benches to-day, as the pioneers or the exponents of any desirable or useful development.

## VII.

## THE LABOUR ELECTORAL ASSOCIATION.

At London, in 1881, the Report of the Parliamentary Committee contains a paragraph under the heading of Labour Representation, but is, in context, merely a notification that the Parliamentary Committee has had its eagle eye upon the progress of the Corrupt Practices Bill, and the Ballot Bill, which had, during the previous year, been introduced, but had not, at the time of Congress, reached second reading stages.

Almost at the fag end of the Congress, Mr. Crawford (Durham Miners) proposed, and Mr. Toyn (Cleveland) seconded—

> That this Congress regards the return of working men to Parliament not only as a matter of justice but also one of paramount importance, and therefore instructs the P.C. to give to *trustworthy* working men candidates all the assistance they possibly can.

This resolution, now among the established pietisms of the Congress, was, as usual, carried unanimously.

In 1882, Alexander McDonald died. The Congress was held at Manchester. No remarks appear

in the Parliamentary Committee's Report in reference to Labour Representation, but a curious change takes place in the phraseology of the resolution. Mr. George Shipton moved—

That in the opinion of this Congress a large measure of direct representation of Labour in Parliament is desirable, and even necessary, in the interest of the working classes and the nation at large; that the time has arrived when this question should pass from the region of abstract discussion to the domain of practical Labour politics, and that the organised workmen of this country be called upon to establish a special fund to enable Labour candidates to contest constituencies when vacancies offer, and also for the support of such representatives when in Parliament.

An amendment was moved which, while endorsing the first pious element, repudiated the "fund" suggestion and demanded State payment of members and election expenses. The amendment was carried by 63 votes to 43.

At Nottingham, 1883, a resolution on broadly the same lines as Mr. Shipton's 1882 resolution was moved, and again the same amendment was placed against it. After a confused discussion the latter was accepted by the mover of the resolution and carried unanimously.

Aberdeen, 1884. At this Congress, Mr. John Wilson, of the Durham Miners, proposed—

That this Congress expresses its regret that so small a number of direct representatives of Labour have been sent to Parliament, and is strongly of opinion that this state of things will continue until the working classes more effectually organise themselves to secure this object than they have hitherto done. The Congress would therefore strongly advise the working population to take immediate steps to

avail themselves of any opportunity that may arise either in by-elections or in the general election, which cannot now be very long deferred.

As this was seconded by Mr. David Holmes—to the end of his life a faithful and unchanging Liberal—its intention is not as mysterious as its phraseology would make it appear. The "Payment of Members" Amendment was again moved, but was withdrawn to be sent to Standing Orders Committee to be drafted as a separate motion.

Here appears, for the first time, the idea of forming a deliberate political organisation, though still no thought of an independent Parliamentary force. Mr. Threlfall, who was then representing the Southport Trades Council and who was afterwards to attain some celebrity as the secretary of the Labour Electoral Association, moved as an amendment:—

And that the Parliamentary Committee be empowered to form a fund and appeal for funds for the election and maintenance of members.

The political ambition of the old brigade is sufficiently indicated by the fact that this amendment received only four votes, and on the original resolution being again put it was carried unanimously.

At Southport the following year (1885) Mr. T. R. Threlfall was president. In his presidential address he appears to have given what was really the first direct lead in the line of political Trade Unionism.

It seems to me that the most critical period in the history of Trade Unionism is at this moment. They must either

lead or follow; they cannot halt between two opinions. They must form the nucleus of the Labour Party of the future or sink into comparative insignificance.

This Congress made some attempt to enforce a test question upon candidates for the coming General Election, and generally talked round the situation, but the Labour Representation resolution was nothing but an amiable expression of satisfaction with "the increased activity prevailing on this subject as evidenced by the successful formation of Labour Associations in many of our large industrial centres."

The Hull Congress of 1886 may be considered a highly interesting if not an epoch-making gathering. Mr. F. Maddison was president, and devoted a considerable portion of his address to the question of Labour Representation. There had been a General Election during the year which had passed since the previous Congress, and nine more members had been added to the total of Liberal-Labour nominees. Mr. Broadhurst had been "elevated" to a place in the Ministry. In spite of these achievements, we find Mr. Maddison concluding his remarks on this topic with the following suggestive sentence:—

But this number is not enough to accomplish our work. Compared with the number they represent they are a mere handful, and to a certain extent they will remain a small, insufficient band until the whole system is altered.

Mr. Threlfall had embodied the scheme of the Labour Electoral Association in the following resolution:—

That this Congress views with satisfaction the growing intelligence of the masses to recognise in their emancipation the power they possess to demand the inalienable right of men in making laws to which they have to subscribe; and that in order to give practical effect to the varied resolutions passed at previous Congresses on the question of Labour Representation it is essential to form an Electoral Labour Committee which shall act in conjunction with the Parliamentary Committee, the Labour Representatives in the House of Commons, and the friends of Labour Representation throughout the country. That to effectually carry out the foregoing declaration, Congress shall at its annual meetings elect a Labour Electoral Committee which shall be constituted as follows: Great Britain and Ireland to be divided into eight divisions—Eastern Division to consist of two members, Western Division three members, Northern Division five members, Southern Division three members, Midland Division four members; Scotland, three members; Ireland, two members; and Wales, two members.

An amendment was moved which, while agreeably endorsing the sentiment, was practically a direct negative, but it received only two votes, the resolution being ultimately carried by 59 to 19. The first Electoral Committee was subsequently elected at this Congress. That this committee did little or nothing of any importance is due to the fact that its personnel was almost entirely Liberal. That it failed ignobly and perished as it deserved can be accounted for by its entire want of a conception of its possibilities. Yet it was, as we have seen, the highest altitude of political aspiration the Trade Unions had reached in twenty years under the leadership of the old-world captains.

## VIII.

## THE STRIKING OF THE ROOTS.

In the Report of the First Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee (1900-1) there appears a short sketch of the movement from 1868 forward, which contains the following statement:—

> Immediately after the Reform Act of 1868, which enfranchised working men in the boroughs, a movement started both inside and outside the Trade Union ranks demanding that an end should be put to the legal grievances which Trade Unions then suffered by sending to the House of Commons a body of Trade Union representatives. The Labour Representation League, established for this purpose, was essentially a Trade Union Congress offshoot.

This statement is inaccurate. The Labour Representation League, which must not be confounded with the later creation of 1887, the Labour Electoral Association, was clearly in existence before the Trade Union Congress, for we find its advocates "reading papers" at the earliest Congresses. What does seem clear is that the League was occupied with abortive efforts to engraft itself and its principles upon the Unions. It reached the climax of its influence in 1874, when it sent fourteen candidates to the poll and gained two seats at Stafford and Morpeth with Alex.

McDonald and T. Burt. After these events it appears to have died out, and those who will carefully follow the records need be under no illusions as to the cause of its dying. The old leaders were willing enough to use it for the purposes of their own advancement, but feared the new and strident tendencies which they knew instinctively it would engender.

The Labour Electoral Association on the other hand was a Trade Union Congress "offshoot," and the preceding chapter shows to what extent the old leaders welcomed and helped it. It was tainted with Liberalism from the beginning. That it would finally have hitched the whole force of organised Labour on to the Liberal Party had its chief moving spirits had a clear course, the events immediately subsequent to its formation very clearly indicate. It was given an official start at Swansea in 1887, but at the two preceding Congresses held at Southport and Hull respectively, it was discussed. Its chief advocate seems to have been T. R. Threlfall, who became its secretary and moving spirit during its short and ignoble career. It was at the Swansea Congress that the new influences began to make themselves felt. The opening passages of the struggle for ascendency between the old brigade of Liberal-Labour hacks and the coming force of Independent Labour are distinctly traceable. Swansea was Keir Hardie's first Congress. He represented the Ayrshire Miners, an organisation he had spent some years in building up. The opening sentences of his first speech

are characteristic of the courage and constancy with which he has fought for the cause of Independent Labour from that day to this.

I object to Labour Representatives identifying themselves with one political party. We must have men in the House who will not go to constituencies just because they called themselves Liberals, but were in direct antagonism to the working classes.

Here begins the striking of the roots of the Labour Party of the future. The sentiment was promptly suppressed, partly by contemptuous references to the youth and inexperience of the speaker and partly by appeals for sympathy and confidence for the "tried and trusted" leaders of the hallowed, if somewhat sterile, past. The idea of independence, even so vaguely hinted at, was howled down, and at the end of the Congress we find the new auxiliary of the Trade Unions launched upon the troubled waters of politics, loaded to the sinking-point with partisan dead-weight and manned with a complete crew of Liberals.

The new ideas and their exponents had not risen in vain. The next year (1888) the Congress was held at Bradford, and we find that the old Union element had taken alarm. The forward tendency was ruthlessly suppressed, and, indeed, the developments of that year, though unrecorded in Congress annals, and, I believe, to this day not very generally remembered or known, afford a very sufficient explanation. The truth is that the new Electoral Association had justified its parentage and had already struck its flag to the enemy.

The events now to be related, though more personal than general, in no sense constitute a digression. They throw a lurid light upon matters that may have seemed dark and mysterious. In April, 1888, a vacancy occurred in Mid-Lanark, and Keir Hardie stood as an *Independent Labour candidate* against an official Liberal and an official Tory. It was in the spacious days of the late Mr. Schnadhorst, the great Radical caucus-monger. The political complications foreshadowed by an Independent Labour Force were instantly realised by that astute gentleman, who proceeded to the seat of the contest to interview the presumptuous young miner. Hardie refused to see Mr. Schnadhorst, and Sir George Trevelyan made an attempt with but slightly better results. Hardie saw Sir George, by whom he was offered £300 per annum, a safe seat, presumably in the official Liberal interest—and his election expenses, if he would consent to withdraw. These alluring offers were treated with amused contempt and rejected.

But the resources of Liberalism were by no means exhausted. By whom or what motives prompted, Mr. Threlfall, the secretary of the new Labour Electoral Association, subsequently repeated the offer, and urged Hardie to accept it. That irreconcilable and truculent person violently ejected the emissary and perversely went to the poll, securing 619 votes, and, as he expressed it, "more fun than he ever enjoyed before or since."

Hardie was by no means a pioneer in this department of political unorthodoxy. Two or three

years previously John Burns had contested a seat in Nottingham with even smaller results in votes. The propaganda phase of electioneering had set in, and it will be seen that this development owed no thanks to Liberal-Labourism. From end to end of the records there is no trace of the old leaders assisting the growth of real Labour Representation.

How far Hardie's experience of the old gang may have stimulated his hostility to them, he himself may possibly have forgotten by now. The Report of the famous Dundee Congress of 1889 is blurred by the personalities which characterised it. Out of the squalor of the acrimony and undignified recrimination which were its chief features the only gleam of light is the concluding paragraph of Hardie's speech:—

> All we ask for is that the men who stand on the platform as leaders of Trade Unionism should know no party but the party to which they belonged—the party of Labour in this country—concerning which Whigs and Tories were agreed in seeking to oppress and keep down and trample under foot to prevent it from coming into its own.

Liberal-Labourism, chargeable with having throttled every effort in the direction of independent political action up to this point, seems to have been the destroyer of the Labour Electoral Association. At the Congress of 1890 we find Hardie denouncing Threlfall and his association for having given instructions that "where there was a middle-class candidate who sympathised with Labour he was not to be opposed by a Labour candidate." The true inwardness of this instruction had been sufficiently revealed at Mid-Lanark,

and though the apostleship of independence was not numerous or powerful enough to carry Congress, it was sufficient to keep in constant exposure the besetting frailty of the old gang.

The new Unionism had entered the field at this time. Broadhurst and his disciples had held, as an article of faith, that it was impossible to organise the unskilled and casual labourers. The results of the great Dock Strike in 1889 had seemed a falsification of this belief, and men began to look forward to Unskilled Labour Unions which would overshadow in numbers and influence the great established amalgamations. After twenty years of effort in this direction the new Unionism has failed to organise one unskilled worker in a hundred, but has, nevertheless, been a potent influence in the life and growth of the political Unionism of our time. With it came the fertilising agencies which from 1889 began to surround and encroach upon the weed-grown field of the old Unionism. Latent forces began to quicken and long-subdued influences began to rise and flourish.

Hyndman and the earnest if somewhat dogmatic discipleship of Marx had been fulminating to small and languid audiences for years. Hardie, despairing of any good results from the now discredited Labour Electoral Association, had called, in August, 1888, a conference at Glasgow, and formed the Scottish Labour Party which finally merged, in 1893, with the Independent Labour Party; William Morris had long proclaimed the faith, Robert Blatchford, and his brilliant comrades Thompson

and Fay were teaching a newer and truer gospel; Burns, Mann, Tillet, Curran, Thorne, and Hammill were organising, orating; and beneath them all, whether their object was conscious or unconscious, the seed of the Labour Movement struck root.

## IX.

## THE NEW UNIONISTS.

The preceding examination of the Trade Union Congress records has been concentrated upon one point—that of tracing the development of working class aspiration in the direction of direct political representation. Both in Webb's "History of Trade Unionism" and Howell's "Conflicts of Capital and Labour" there appear more or less elaborate and comprehensive examinations of the general activities of the Unions under the auspices of Congress. Howell's summary of conclusions has already been quoted (Chapter VI.). One sentence only of Webb's general criticism—having reference to the situation in 1885-6—is enough.

*Laisser faire, then, was the political and social creed of the Trade Union leaders of this time.*

But let the typical Trade Union leader of that time speak for himself. Thus Mr. John Burnett, the General Secretary of the A.S.E. in 1886:—

> The condition of the workers never was improved until the era of Trade Unions, and all their improvement, whether in wages or better conditions of labour, has gone on step by step with the extension and adoption of Trade Union principles.

Since the establishment of Trade Unions we have seen a more equal distribution of the wealth of the country and a greater participation by the workers in the fruit of their labour.

By the disbursement of their funds for friendly purposes they have reduced and prevented pauperism, and rendered their members the most peaceful and contented portion of the toiling population.

No stronger barriers to social revolution exist than those which have been erected by the Unions.

And some of them, at least, believed it!

It would be well for Labour and its cause, to say nothing of its friends and guides, if its story could be written without the mention of an individual name. Unhappily, the long and hitherto impregnable rule of the old gang had reduced the whole body of organised labour to a state of fluidity which rendered it peculiarly amenable to surface disturbances. Whoever cast a stone into its stagnation might be sure to make bubbles and rings if nothing else. The Socialism of that time made its appeal to the mass of the people and not specially to the organised workers. For years, the Social Democrats and the Socialist League had been crying in the wilderness, and it is not remarkable that more than one Messiah should arise with the confident belief that each was the true child of prophecy. Of the new school of leaders Keir Hardie alone appears to have remained constant to the ideals of his early years. The desire to bring the organised workers into line with Socialism by substituting for the old effete industrialism a strident and aggressive political party is apparent all through his work. He was just a few years too

soon. The patient plodding which such a propaganda necessitated was too great an effort for his contemporaries. John Burns and Tom Mann were obviously the teachers of the hour and they seem, for the next few years, to have absorbed all the attention the Trade Unionists could spare away from the worship of their ancient and decaying gods.

Until the dock strike neither Burns nor Mann appear to have had any settled method in mind. Burns was occupied chiefly in Marxian propaganda of the most violent type, in the intervals of truculently denouncing Henry Broadhurst for committing precisely the offence which he himself has since not only committed but improved upon. Mann, although then a Social Democrat, was preaching a "Compulsory Eight Hour Day" as a panacea for all the industrial and social evils of the time.

The Dundee Congress of 1889 resulted in a complete triumph for the old leaders. Burns, who was selected by the A.S.E. as one of their delegates, was too deeply engaged in the Dock Strike to be present, and the burden of the attack was left to Keir Hardie, who was hopelessly worsted. But, outside Congress, forces were breeding which might have anticipated the advent of the Labour Party by at least a decade had they been utilised by men who had any higher inspiration than self-interest. The Dock Strike was nominally a movement to make "sixpence an hour" the minimum wage of the dock labourers. Its chief actual results

were the impetus it gave to the strike as an instrument of industrial betterment, a vast accession to Trade Union strength and influence, and the public prominence it gave to its engineers. Whether its precise story will ever be told is doubtful, but John Burns's own version, told personally to the present writer, may be of some interest.

It was a time when Trade Unions were starting into existence with unprecedented profusion and variety. Amongst a hundred others, the Tea Operatives Union had been started under the leadership of Ben Tillet. Mann had visited the docks for the purpose of attempting to organise another group of dock workers. The Tea Operatives had taken a fit of jealousy, and in order to establish the superiority of their own organisation, had called a strike for higher wages. Burns related how Mann had called at his house to tell him that a strike had broken out in the docks and suggested a joint visit to see what the trouble was about. After investigation Burns declared that he and Mann conceived the possibility of fanning this spark into a huge conflagration. The subsequent events of this strike are hardly germane to this story. Whatever it did or failed to do for the dockers, it placed Burns upon a pedestal from which he first began to look over the heads of former associates and see, afar off, the land of promise which nobody, who knows him, doubts to have been the cynosure of his earliest hopes.

Whatever accessions to the common stock of

political Trade Unionism may be justly attributed to the " new Unionism," it has to be admitted that it has so multiplied sectionalism and superfluous officialism as to make concerted action by the workers infinitely more difficult than ever. From this time (1889) we find new men and new sentiments rising in the Congress. But we also find the old faults reproduced in different guise. The old leaders were charged, not unjustly, with subordinating general interests to individual ambitions, with using the Unions for lower purposes than professions would seem to justify. Yet the advent of the brigade of new Unionists left the formation of a political Labour Party as problematical as ever.

Burns, who never rested from his ferocious attacks upon Broadhurst, duplicated the offences with which he charged his enemy. To-day he is the consistent eulogist of the old thrift-loving, benefit-paying Trade Unionist, and has clasped to his bosom every old world and reactionary fallacy which he repudiated so scornfully in the past. All because Trade Unionism has presumed to take higher ground without his guidance and lead, and that is entirely his own fault.

Tom Mann, with far more consistency, is, to-day, fulminating against the political organisation of the workers. He began as a militant industrialist, and is one yet, but he has filled in a long interval with political efforts and was secretary to the Independent Labour Party for one period.

Mysterious as Burns's motives may have been at that time, nobody need doubt them now. His untiring vigour and energy, his daring egotism and his pushful impudence, were not the least valuable of his available assets. For the next few years he practically dominated the Trade Unions and succeeded in elbowing off the stage rivals and opponents alike. Like the old leaders to whose fall his virulent denunciations had so largely contributed, his own outlook was just as narrow and just as personal, as his subsequent career has abundantly demonstrated. Yet, unconsciously, he helped, as much as any man of his time, to build the Labour Party of to-day.

## X.

## THE LAST OF THE LABOUR ELECTORAL ASSOCIATION.

By 1891 the Labour Electoral Association had degenerated into an unabashed auxiliary of the Liberal Party. Mr. Threlfall, whose name seems inseparable from the question of Labour Representation, was to the fore at that year's Congress with the old stock resolution, rendered in the following terms:—

> That this Congress condemns the continued neglect of Labour questions by the House of Commons, and regards drastic industrial reform as impossible until by concerted action a strong and vigorous Labour Party has been returned to Parliament, and urges the United Trades of this country to seize every opportunity, etc.

This time-worn absurdity merely gives expression to a bare sentiment that had been paraded for over twenty-five years. It was moved to add to it a proposal which, for the time, foreshadowed the outline of the present Labour Party, as follows:—

> And would suggest to the organised trades of this country to so alter their rules as to admit of their subscribing to a Parliamentary fund to be placed at the disposal of Congress to secure Labour Representation based upon the decisions of the Congress.

This amendment was defeated, only 19 votes being recorded for it. The Parliamentary Committee of the time, though it included several men who are now members of the Labour Party, was not inclined to advise the workers to undertake so daring a responsibility, and the Congress contented itself with another expression of abiding faith in Labour Representation, and its trembling fear to take any steps to reduce it to practice. A further amendment was moved by Keir Hardie, which embodied what is practically the existing constitution of the present Labour Party, but this was negatived by 200 votes to 93.

At Glasgow, in 1892, the irrepressible Threlfall came again with the old antiquated stock resolution. McDonald and Quelch moved the Social Democratic test which has since developed into an annual as hardy but as fruitless as the rest of the Congressional futilities.

> No candidate shall receive the support of the working classes unless he is in agreement with the principle of complete national control of the means of production and distribution.

Here begins the "programme" dogma which has figured so obstructively ever since. Threlfall's resolution was carried again by a large majority, 153 voting for it and 128 for the Social Democratic Federation amendment. Nothing was done. The aspirations of the Trade Unionist delegates were fully satisfied by the passing of empty resolutions, and it is probable that they then accurately represented the faith of the rank and file.

For the next two or three years Burns appears to have spread his elastic personality over the entire working-class movement. The ideas he had in his mind are more accurately indicated by developments than by his pompous utterances. Early in 1893, he, Hardie, and Havelock Wilson, had been returned to Parliament, and Burns's hostility to Hardie, in the light of the current and subsequent events, appears to have been inspired by the idea that Hardie's consistent policy was by no means the line of least resistance to the Treasury Bench. Though there were other nominal Labour Members in the same Parliament, the three new men had been elected upon independent tickets, and their first anxiety was upon which side of the House they should sit. They met in one of the rooms to consider their policy, and an angry discussion followed—Hardie had no doubt about the course to be taken. He was not elected as a Liberal, and emphatically refused to sit on the Government side. Burns's frantic denunciations of Liberalism in the past had placed him in the awkward position of needing an act of inconsistency on Hardie's part if only as an excuse for one on his own. The latter was immovable, and Burns was practically forced to sit in opposition during that Parliament. Wilson had less need to hesitate, and appears to have sat with the Government. From that day, however, Burns and Hardie have never been on the most amiable terms.

This incident throws some light upon the proceedings of the Belfast Congress of 1893,

which gathering, as well as two or three succeeding Congresses, was largely dominated by Burns. Ultimate motives were not so fully disclosed by events as they now are.

The newer school of leaders was in strong force at Belfast. Tillet moved the time-worn resolution, but in a more practical and less sentimental form. Its general sense was "that a separate fund be established for the purpose of assisting independent candidates in local and Parliamentary elections."

This Congress marks the final departure of the last remnants of the inglorious Labour Electoral Association, one delegate, Mr. Cowgill, remarking "that at one time it (the L.E.A.) had done good work, but now it had degenerated into a wing of the Liberal Party."

The Social Democrats moved their orthodox test as an addendum to the resolution, and the whole was carried by 150 votes to 52.

The most significant indication of the temper and predominant influences at work in the Belfast Congress is that though it was eminently Socialistic, after a kind, it absolutely refused to accept the following resolution which Hardie moved:—

> That in the opinion of this Congress the claims of Labour in Parliament should be asserted irrespective of the convenience of any political party, and to secure this it is necessary that the Labour Members in the House of Commons should be unconnected with either the Liberal or Tory party, and should sit in opposition to any Government until such time as they are strong enough to form a Labour Cabinet.

This was defeated by 119 votes to 96!

There was this year a further widening of the breach. Hardie had urged his two colleagues to co-operate in moving the adjournment to call attention to the unemployed, a suggestion hotly opposed by Burns. How Hardie was left alone in this business is a matter of history—and also a matter which accounts for more than the mere personal squabble between him and his colleagues.

At Norwich, the following year (1894), John Burns's influence was still in the ascendent. There was no resolution in favour of Labour Representation, but only one in favour of "Payment of Members," moved by David Holmes. The object of the "people's tribune" was not merely to kick away the ladder by which he had climbed, but to break it so that no rival could mount by the same means. "Adventurers" were discovered in the Congress, and the standing orders were in need of amendment so that they would preclude the admission of such men as were not working at the trade or were not Trade Union officials. True, such rule would bar out Burns himself, but then, Trade Unionism and its Congress had done for him what it had done for Broadhurst—all he wanted.

## XI.

## THE RISING OF THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY.

THERE was room for only one star to shine in the firmament that Burns condescended to adorn, and it is not at all surprising to find that the star-gazing of the period from 1890 to 1895 was concentrated upon a single orb. What is surprising to us now is that its true magnitude was so strangely exaggerated.

The new elements were, however, concentrating and solidifying. The idea of making Trade Unionism the mass of a great political force with a Socialistic centre of inspiration seems never to have been clearly held. Even Hardie, who during these years was endeavouring to develop the Scottish Labour Party, appears to have been undecided. The apparent hopelessness of such a task as that of adapting the existing industrial organisations to the pursuit of social betterment through political avenues, had evidently been accentuated. Men like Burns gave such an ideal plenty of lip service and as much actual opposition once it had served its purpose. Just as Broadhurst, Threlfall, Howell, and others had talked about it

in season and had taken the most scrupulous care that it was never interpreted into practice, so the new school repeated the sins of its predecessors.

The Independent Labour Party was inaugurated in 1893, and its effects upon the Labour world have been profound and permanent.

Hardie's most recent explanation of the genesis of the Independent Labour Party is too vague and unthoughtful for acceptance.

How did the I.L.P. originate? Who shall say? Why do the buds begin to unfold in spring? The mysterious influences of nature have appointed times and seasons in which they begin to operate; and so, too, I am convinced, there are springtides connected with the affairs of man, governed by laws of which we know nothing. Be this as it may, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century the new spirit began to make itself felt in this country. At first it took the form of strikes and combinations amongst the hitherto unorganised and unskilled workers. A little later it began to manifest itself as a more or less definitely political movement. The Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society, and, later, the Socialist League, came into being. The League, however, owing to its anti-parliamentarianism, and the Federation by its absence of political aptitude, had failed to obtain any hold upon the public mind, whilst the Fabians confined themselves to an educational propaganda. About the year 1890 political Labour Organisations began to spring into spontaneous being under various names all over the country. There is some dispute as to which of the big towns was the first to adopt the name Independent Labour Party, but as the new movement developed this came to be the title which was found to have most favour by the new organisations. Each succeeding year of this period saw the question of Socialism and Labour politics entering more and more into the debates and proceedings of the Trade Union Congress, and when the general election of 1892 came round there was quite a number of I.L.P. candidates in the field.

We need but put a simple question to ourselves

to determine the matter. Had the Unions taken up the question of Independent Labour Representation with any degree of sincerity and determination, would there have been the necessity or even the possibility of the Independent Labour Party? For nearly thirty years the Congress had passed resolutions and had achieved no better results than a breed of Liberal hacks. The Labour Electoral Association—the only actual political creation of the Unions—had drifted out with the same tide that had carried the old hands into Liberalism. Trade Unionism appeared to be more unamenable than ever. The new Unionism differed from the old only in the terminology it used. Its sheet anchor was the strike, and politics was but a shade more important an accessory than it had been. The creed of Tom Mann and John Burns was little more than "raise wages by strike and reduce hours by Act of Parliament." It is impossible to believe that the Independent Labour Party was so unconscious a movement as is suggested.

Keir Hardie's presidential speech at the Independent Labour Party's second conference at Manchester in 1894, contains the following:—

> It is perfectly evident that some new and strong force is necessary to unite the democracy against oppression, against privilege, against monopoly; and there is no force so powerful for this purpose as the force of Socialism, which promises to bring about economically the same freedom we are supposed to enjoy politically and religiously. I believe the I.L.P. has a great opportunity if, only discarding all minor issues, it remembers that it is created for the purpose of realising Socialism—that that is the one item of its programme, and

that the means by which it is proposed to realise Socialism is the creation of an Independent Labour Party in the House of Commons and in every representative institution.

Ten years of persistent agitation within the Trade Unions had been negatived. The doors of Congress were soon to be closed against all men who had raised themselves above the handling of manual tools or who were not paid officials of the organisations. The Social Democrats clung tenaciously to their dogmatic test, and would have no nonconformity. Burns, who had been their rising hope, was already the object of their vehement denunciations; the new Union boom was passing and the country was rapidly wheeling back to Toryism—as always, as a relief from Liberalism and the only alternative.

At Cardiff the Congress swung back to reaction. The movement for the expulsion of "adventurers" culminated in a complete triumph for the old gang, amongst whom Burns had now established himself. The chief item on the agenda was the discussion of the new standing orders which Burns had industriously engineered for more than a year. An angry controversy arose. The new regulations involved the future exclusion of Burns himself. It also meant the ostracism of Broadhurst, Mann, and Hardie. Burns's concluding remark in this discussion is interesting as indicative of what was in his mind. Hardie was at this time out of Parliament, having been defeated at the previous General Election, and Burns himself was sitting with the Liberals.

I believe that in the interest of Labour Mr. Broadhurst and I must go out because through the gate through which we pass every impostor can go. I affirm that real independent Labour and real Socialism can only succeed by sending *bonâ-fide* working men and honest officials to represent the working men of this country.

At the previous General Election the newly-formed Independent Labour Party had run twenty-three candidates, all of whom were defeated. The suspicion that the means for these contests came from tainted sources roused the well-remembered cry of "Tory gold." Councillor Jenkins, now a member of the Labour Party, was the president of the Cardiff Congress, and he thus laments the degeneracy of the times.

I heartily rejoice that Messrs. Burt, Burns, Mabon, Pickard, Arch, Wilson, Broadhurst, and Randall have retained their seats, but the defeat of such worthy men as Messrs. Sam Woods, G. Howell, W. Cremer, J. M. Rolands, Ed. Harford, and J. H. Wilson I deplore. An interesting feature of the late election was the number of candidates professedly put forward in the Labour interest. A majority were the nominees of an electoral association rejoicing in the name of the Independent Labour Party. These independent candidates, though backed by the most meagre following in several constituencies, had no difficulty in finding the requisite funds. One thing is self-evident: these workmen adherents did not subscribe the large aggregate sum expended. Then it is fair to ask—who did?

The "Tory gold" fiction did duty for long enough—and its acceptance as truth by the workers was a potent factor in deterring the movement. If the well-authenticated story of "Liberal gold" in Mid-Lanark had been told it would not have been believed. To-day we can afford to smile at the follies of the past, and those who remember the

impecunious disadvantages of the old days will wonder how Socialism has kept so clear of temptation. Some idea of the reckless courage that defied even the terrors of pennilessness may be formed from the following account of Curran's fight at Barnsley told by Keir Hardie:—

A vacancy occurred at Barnsley, and the National Council of the Party had a meeting to consider it. We had not one penny in the funds; in fact, we were in debt. There was only a small struggling branch in the town of Barnsley itself, whilst the constituency was one of many miles in extent. I was deputed by the Council to visit Barnsley and consult with the local members about the vacancy. The meeting was held in a small, evil-smelling loft over a stable, and there were present fourteen members all told. The election, we knew, would cost three or four hundred pounds, and I suggested that the first thing to be done was to find out what funds could be raised. Each member present was asked to guarantee a certain sum, which he would raise by hook or by crook before election day, and when these promises were all totalled up we found we had sums promised amounting to £2 13s. 6d. A majority of the members were against fighting until one comrade, a Swiss, who had been in a good way of business, but was then earning his living as a working jeweller, drew off a massive solitaire diamond ring which he was wearing and putting it on the table said: "There, that will fetch £25 in any pawn-shop; that is my contribution to the fight." That settled the matter, and we straightway adopted Pete Curran as the candidate, and next day the campaign was in full swing. Every parson in the constituency, every newspaper, every Trade Union official of any standing was against us. We were stoned by the miners, who formed the bulk of the electors, and hooted by women and children on the streets. We had to be our own chairman at meetings, and seldom found a supporter with sufficient courage to move the resolution of confidence in the candidate. But we went through with the contest, polling over 1,000 votes, and to-day the Barnsley division is almost solid for Socialism.

All the force the old official Trade Union

element could command was turned against the new movement. The seeds sown during the régime of the Burns syndicate bore fruit after its kind the next year at Edinburgh, where the first Congress under the new standing orders was held. It was chastely free from adventurers and impostors, and absolutely innocent of useful purpose. It was moved as an instruction to the Parliamentary Committee to circularise the Trade Unions with the following inquiry:—

> Are your members willing to subscribe one penny per quarter for the purpose of contesting seats and supporting *bonâ-fide* Trade Unionist candidates pledged to neither of the old political parties, Tory or Liberal?

The resolution was defeated by 136 votes to 62.

At Birmingham in the following year (1897) the independent resolution was again moved, and again defeated, by a greater majority; and at Bristol, in 1898, the Unions were too busy with the work of instituting their absurd General Federation to even discuss the matter of Parliamentary representation, but nevertheless demonstrated their traditional common sense by passing resolutions in favour of nationalising nearly everything except Labour. As a result of these inspired efforts, the Unions are now possessed of their Federation, which has developed into a sort of glorified penny bank, but which, however, only pays out for strikes and has for this reason fostered and stimulated the old Union policy which otherwise might have passed into disuse.

While there was still a large majority of the old

official element to dominate the Congress, the influence of the Socialist teachings of the time had made a deep impression on the rank and file of the Unions.

The Congress of 1898 gave little hint of changing policy. The "Socialist" resolutions had become hardy annuals, it is true, and were, as usual, passed with an enthusiasm as remarkable as the ease with which they were forgotten. It is during the two or three years which elapsed between the abdication of the Burns and Broadhurst governments that the work of the Independent Labour Party and the kindred bodies was carried on behind the scenes, but that work is probably the greatest, if the most unconscious, work they have ever done. The foundations of the olden prejudices were being sapped, and the very next year, at Plymouth, the new movement was conceived and born.

## XII.

## THE BIRTH OF THE LABOUR PARTY.

Moved by J. Holmes (Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants), seconded by J. Sexton (National Union of Dock Labourers):—

That this Congress having regard to the decisions of former years, and with a view to securing a better representation of the interests of Labour in the House of Commons, hereby instructs the Parliamentary Committee to invite the co-operation of all the Co-operative, Socialistic, Trade Union and other working-class organisations to jointly co-operate on lines mutually agreed upon in convening a special Congress of representatives from such of the above-named organisations as may be willing to take part to devise ways and means for the securing an increased number of Labour Members to the next Parliament.

The above is the resolution which gave birth to the Labour Party. It was carried by 546 votes to 434. The old Union prejudice was not voiced by any prominent exponent, but found characteristic expression through Mr. Tom Ashton, of the Oldham Cotton Spinners—who, curiously enough, became a Parliamentary candidate under Labour Party auspices four years later. "If this proposition is passed," he said, "not one Trade Unionist out of 10,000 would take notice of it. Therefore, why should Congress waste time over it? If our society was to interfere in politics it would go

down immediately, but by keeping clear of politics it would become a strong organisation."

Mr. Ashton spoke the mind of the old leaders. Nobody would take any more notice of this resolution than of the thirty Congressional declarations preceding it. John Burns's splendid blunder, that of expelling Socialism from the Congress, was but another illustration of a builder "building better than he knew." Had the militant Socialists remained they would have been impotent. Outside the Congress they were free to propagate. On the face of it the Plymouth resolution bears little if any sign of new inspiration. It might easily have been burked or ignored, and doubtless would have been had the Parliamentary Committee realised the forces behind it or the consequences it bore. It was the power behind the throne that was hidden from them, the power of the rising Socialist element amongst the rank and file of the Unionists.

Happily for the Labour Party it was born in poverty and doubt. Congress did not realise its possibilities. The old Labour Representation League had perished, the more recent Labour Electoral Association had passed and left no tangible force or sign. It was endorsed by a considerable but not an overwhelming majority—it was nebulous and uncertain. If it had ridden on a great flood of enthusiasm with ample and assured financial backing there would have been keen competition for its offices and its emoluments. But it demanded patient and unpaid work, earnestness, courage, and self-sacrifice, and, above all, the

grip of a master hand practised and expert in handling not only then existing but future potentialities. Had it been foreseen that its secretaryship would have become in less than ten years the most important and responsible in the whole Labour world, its fortunes might have been different.

Whoever will take the trouble to follow Keir Hardie's constant and unfaltering advocacy through the preceding twelve years can hardly fail to recognise the extent to which the existing Labour Party is indebted to him. But he had still, in 1900, more foes than friends amongst the old leaders, and more doubters than followers amongst the rank and file. Nor were his attributes precisely those which fitted him for the details of the practical organisation of the elements he had done so much to create. That, more than any other living man, he made the Labour Party possible, the records bear indisputable testimony. It was left for other men to make a living reality of it. In 1868 the hour had come and brought no man. Twenty years later it brought only T. R. Threlfall. Half a dozen times the possibility of creating a new political force had quickened and manifested itself, but no resolute hands had been open to grasp and develop it.

The simple records of the next year are eloquent enough without special pleading. The instant the Congress had committed itself once more to the bare expression of Independent Labour, the work of implementing it was whipped out of the languid

grasp of the Parliamentary Committee. We find a conference of delegates, two each from the Congress, the I.L.P., the S.D.F., and the Fabian Society meeting, and James Ramsay MacDonald entrusted with the work of formulating an independent constitution, eventually attenuated by the Parliamentary Committee, for whose susceptibilities it apparently went too far, into the agenda for the Special Congress which met at the Memorial Hall, London, on February 27th, 1900. Before the next Trade Union Congress met in the same year, MacDonald was able to make his first report (see Appendix 3), and show a membership of 232,000. The report of the Parliamentary Committee of 1900 contains the following paragraph, which shows that somebody had been stirring the dry bones of the old unionism.

The Labour Representation Committee met at the Friendly and Trade Society's Club at two o'clock. There were present Mr. Rogers representing the London Vellum Binders, Mr. Hodge (Steel Smelters), Mr. Curran (Gas Workers), Mr. Wilkie (Shipwrights), Councillor Gee (Textile Workers), Messrs. Quelch and Watts (Social Democratic Federation), Mr. E. Pease (Fabian Society), Councillor Parker (Independent Labour Party), and Mr. J. R. Macdonald (London), Secretary. After some ordinary business the committee discussed at considerable length the policy to be adopted by them in view of the forthcoming General Election. Some twenty candidates under the auspices of the committee were endorsed, and it was decided to circularise the societies of the country with the object of obtaining a definite return within a month as to where it was proposed to run candidates on the lines already laid down by the committee. It is quite possible that even if a general election takes place at an early date more candidates will be put into the field.

The Memorial Hall Conference had two great results. First it established the new force upon an independent political basis and, with peculiar fitness, the independent resolution stood in the name of the Independent Labour Party, and was moved by Keir Hardie. It formed the basis of organisation and action, and its general sense has been consistently observed ever since.

That this Conference is in favour of a distinct Labour Group in Parliament, who shall have their own Whips and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting Legislation in the direct interest of Labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency; and, further, members of the Labour Group shall not oppose any candidate whose candidature is being promoted in terms of Resolution 1.

The other important result was that it shook down into their places the factions which were contending for supremacy. Burns, after his five years of Liberal-Labourism, appears to have regarded this movement, which, by the way, he had not in any manner assisted, with a surprised curiosity. He was present as a representative of the A.S.E., his colleague being G. N. Barnes. He supported Hardie's resolution with a quaintly innocent reservation, which explains a great deal more of his inner thought than perhaps he intended.

"There was," he said, "*a distinct Labour Group in Parliament*, definitely organised for the past four or five years, of which Mr. Woods and himself were whips. They had not called themselves independent; they had not worn Trilby hats and

red ties; but they had done the work. He would warn the Conference against too much dictation."

The unavoidable inference is that Burns was willing to extend his patronage and approval to any movement which would place itself entirely under his control, and assist in his personal glorification. To have accepted his leadership then would have simply hitched the new movement to the chariot of Liberalism in which this amiable adviser was already comfortably seated. Better men were already guiding the Committee. Burns's influence with the main body of the workers had weakened. The Labour Party was no place for him. His last attempt to side-track the workers failed, and since that day he has been a vindictive and tireless enemy of the Labour Movement. He has gone his way, and the working class movement has no use for his presence, and no regret to express at his going.

He has likened the present Parliamentary Labour men to " fragments of driftwood, borne in on the flood tide of Free Trade." Whether it be true or not, it is at least possible that they may remain on shore when the ebb takes out other pieces of political timber with its backwash.

The Labour Representation Committee soon lost the adherence of the Social Democratic Federation. The cause of this defection was their inability to impose their test upon the whole movement. The idea of assisting in the construction of anything which did not conform to their outline was too much for their pure consciences. And it

appears from their utterances at that time that they believed the Labour Party would be a failure. Having satisfied themselves with denouncing the Fabians and the Independent Labour Party for the monstrous "treason" of following the dictates of common sense, they retired, and have remained officially without the camp, though they make annual and abortive incursions with characteristically negligible results. Relieved in the beginning of such impedimenta as John Burns and the S.D.F., and favoured with earnest and capable guides, the movement has never looked back.

To follow its fortunes in detail would need a bulkier volume than this. For the next five years the story is one of slow but steady progress. It has climbed high enough to be pelted, but happily is strong enough to hold on and hit back.

## XIII.

## INITIAL STRUGGLES.

The story of the initial struggles of the new party is full of instructive incidents. That it survived its first year is a matter of wonder. The Committee failed to get its twenty-two candidates to the poll of 1900, and but actually endorsed fifteen, the list including Mr. W. P. Byles, for East Leeds, apparently endorsed for no other reason than that the Local Trades Council had approved the candidature.

The abuse of constitutional power by which the Government plunged the country into an election in order to snatch a hasty and unformed judgment from the electors, for its own partisan ends, made it impossible for the committee to complete its plan of campaign. The Trade Union candidatures, for the lack of such an organisation as is now being built up, were specially backward, and were not so many as we would have wished, nor as they would have been had the election been delayed for a few months.—*First Annual Report, L.R.C.*

And yet the Labour Representation Committee's list fared remarkably well. Two members of the Committee actually won seats for Labour (the only victories which Labour gained at the election), and, in every case but one, where comparison

with 1895 is possible, its candidates improved their polls. The votes polled were 62,698 out of a total of 177,000. In ten cases the local organisations responsible for the Committee's candidates were strong enough to keep one of the ordinary parties out of the contest; in the other five constituencies they had to fight both parties.

This favourable result is due, in no small measure, to the existence of the Committee, and its manifestoes to the electors in the constituencies where its candidates were running were signed by representatives of all sections of the Labour Movement.

Two only of the fifteen candidates were successful—Richard Bell and Keir Hardie—and these formed the nucleus of the Parliamentary Group. It is a notable fact that the total income of the Committee was only £243 13s. 6d. for the entire year, and that £56 16s. 6d. was actually carried forward as a balance.

In the summer of 1902 D. J. Shackleton was returned unopposed for Clitheroe and filled the place soon to be vacated by Richard Bell. The latter had never from the beginning been heart-whole in the movement.

On December 26th, 1903, Sir Harry Bullard, M.P. for Norwich, died, and it was decided locally that Mr. Roberts, whose candidature we had approved, should go to the poll. The contest almost exclusively turned upon Mr. Chamberlain's fiscal proposals, and labour issues were altogether obscured. Under the circumstances the vote of 2,440 was no mean achievement, especially when it is remembered that there were not more than 1,500 Trade Union Votes on the register. The figures were :—

Louis Tillett (Liberal) ..... 8,576
Ernest Wild (Conservative) ..... 6,756
G. H. Roberts (L.R.C.) ..... 2,440

We regret to report that in connection with this contest Mr. Bell wrote a letter which, though not directly supporting the Liberal candidate, was distinctly antagonistic to the interests of our candidate, Mr. Roberts; and when the result of the election was known Mr. Bell sent a telegram to the successful Liberal candidate as follows: "Great triumph for progress. Hearty congratulations. R. Bell, M.P." We consider this to be a serious departure from the principles upon which this movement was founded, and a breach of the provisions of the constitution safeguarding the independence of the Labour Party.

Prior to this by-election two seats were added to the party. In the beginning of 1903, W. Crooks won a sensational victory at Woolwich, and later, in July of the same year, Arthur Henderson carried Barnard Castle by a narrow majority in a three-cornered fight. The Labour Party in Parliament now consisted of four members, and no further accessions of strength were made to it until the last General Election. The Liberal-Labour Group, which included Bell, numbered ten in all, and amongst that list were several who might have posed under an even more simple title. The legislative achievements of the Labour Party were necessarily unconspicuous. This tiny group constituted the shadow across the floor, but it was ominous enough to turn a Tory Premier so far away from the traditions of his class as to pass an Unemployed Workmen's Act—not a great measure, it is true, yet not so small but that a "Liberal" President of the Local Government Board has found means to make it even smaller.

The great and abiding work of the years 1900-5 was not done on the floor of the House of Commons. It was the result of patient endeavour, of supreme self-sacrifice and earnest faith in the new cause allied to a capacity for organisation of a sort given to few men. Whoever may be the detractors of J. Ramsay MacDonald—whatever may be the reasons for their hostility—not one will seriously deny that the structure of the existing Labour Party from the singularly incongruous and confused elements which composed its material, is largely the result of his indomitable energy and skill.

Examined closely, there is little evidence of either good luck or even favouring influences. Much has been made of the effects of the Taff Vale strike and its subsequent litigation, and the probabilities are that these events had some tendency to stiffen the political ideas of the old Trade Unionists. That those responsible for the promotion of the new organisation made as much as possible of Taff Vale and the flaws in the then existing Labour laws which it disclosed, is true. The reform of the law in the direction of correcting the clauses upon which the judges had based the Taff Vale decision was made to some extent a test question at the last General Election. The labour of constructing the movement owes little of its result to mere opportunism, and had there been no Taff Vale strike and no disconcerting interpretations of the law relating to strikes, the Party would have still been made and consolidated.

During these six years preparations were made for getting fifty candidates to the polls. Those who actually participated in the contests of 1906 will readily admit that, having regard to the available means and material, the arrangements were altogether admirable. Those who looked on from without will need more certain testimony.

The meagreness of the available finances is almost startling. From and including the accounts presented to the first Annual Conference in 1901 the total expenditure from the General Fund amounted to only £4,497 0s. 4d., and from the Parliamentary Fund, established in 1903, £4,191 6s. 10d. The latter, being partly devoted to the upkeep of the four members and including an item of £2,232 15s. for returning officers' fees in fifty contests, can scarcely be called extravagant. The administration charges for the first six years are less than £4,500, and work out to a negligible fraction to each of nearly a million subscribers. There is but one proper inference, and that is that paucity of funds has been compensated for by generous gifts of effort and earnestness which have few parallels in the history of working-class agitations.

## XIV.

## FIRST FRUITS.

THE abject incapacity of the old school of Trade Union leaders has never been so forcibly illustrated as by the birth and subsequent career of the Labour Party. In the first four years of its life it was the Labour Representation Committee of the Trade Union Congress. Its first official Report was, as we have seen, sent to the secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress, and for several years the Congress exercised at least a nominal supervision over its proceedings. Plainly stated, the case was that Congress connived at the creation of a real political machine, and then had neither the skill nor the courage to use it. If its conduct had fallen into the hands of the orthodox group it would not have lived a year.

The quaintest anomaly arose. Congress had given birth to the General Federation of Trade Unions—the functions of which, if ever necessary, were such as Congress should have discharged. But it had already taken up an independent status. The Labour Representation Committee was composed of one alien element—the Socialists—which both the Federation and the parent Congress

lacked. The three bodies had separate and distinct executives, yet each was composed largely of the same persons. But the anomalous composition of the main bodies of the three wings of the movement remained, and, to some extent, still remains. Each has its annual representative meeting, and an examination of the respective lists of delegates will show that the salaried officials of the Unions turn up at all three gatherings with a regularity and enthusiasm worthy, perhaps more than worthy, of three righteous causes. The three executives have now a sort of concordat through the instrumentality of which harmonious relations are maintained between the components of this peculiarly " tangled trinity."

The Labour Representation Committee was destined to remain but a short time within the bosom of the Congress. The officials of the old institution never really loved it. It had falsified expectations in not dying promptly. Its constitution was alien to the pure and holy rule which disallowed men who were " not working at the trade " or in official positions to hold office or belong to it. It was growing apace in strength and popularity, and soon began to occupy too much of the public stage and absorb too much of the popular lime-light. More serious still was the fact that it gave promise of doing real service to the workers and acquired the shocking habit of attempting to interpret its annual resolutions into political practice. A new and unaccustomed growth began to show itself. The following passage from

the report of the National Administrative Council of the Independent Labour Party to the Annual Conference at Leicester in 1901 shows how far the new organisation had developed in the very first year of its existence:—

> One of the most satisfactory features of the recent General Election (1900) was the union of the Labour forces. The opposition between Socialists and Trade Unionists that has brought confusion into Labour contests on some previous occasions was absent last year. This was largely due to the influence of the Labour Representation Committee, who issued to all Labour candidates run by the affiliated organisations a manifesto signed by all the Socialist and Trade Union movements. For the first time these many years this manifesto gave evidence that our labours to unite all working class sections are bearing fruit; and we confidently believe that by continuing the method we have adopted the time is not far distant when the Labour Movement will vote in overwhelming strength in favour of our ideas and policy. The mutual confidence which is springing up in every section of the Labour Movement owing to the existence of this Committee leads us to hope that in it we have at last found the way to a united Socialist and Labour Party.

The condition of dependence of the committee upon the Trade Union Congress could scarcely continue without the danger of friction. To sunder this relation was, however, not so easy. Though the young organisation was fast outgrowing its parent in strength, activity, and usefulness, there were still some binding sentiments of loyalty which kept them together. In 1904, favouring circumstances arose, and, at the Leeds Trade Union Congress, the severance was effected by the parent institution expressly repudiating its own offspring.

Mr. Richard Bell's escapade in 1903 and his obvious leanings towards the Liberal Party had given rise to considerable heartburning and dissatisfaction, and he was the president of the Leeds Trade Union Congress. His political *bonâ fides* were likely to be assailed, and some condemnatory resolutions appeared in the Congress agenda. A happy inspiration filled the official mind. The General Purposes Committee startled the Congress with the following recommendation, through Mr. Brace, its chairman:—

> In considering the resolution and amendments dealing with the Labour Representation Committee we unanimously agree in suggesting that any resolution to endorse or amend the constitution of an *independent and outside body* is out of order.

Mr. Bell most cheerfully acquiesced in this wise proposal and put it to the meeting. It was carried. It was the only bit of good that Mr. Bell and his Liberal-Labour friends had done for the movement and the only service on their part which merits our lasting gratitude. As the movement, from this time forward, ceased to be an auxiliary of the Trade Union Congress, its title "Labour Representation Committee" became a misnomer, and as soon as circumstances permitted the title was changed to the "Labour Party" and the committee became the executive of an entirely independent political agency. The details of the Party's electoral activities are fully set forth in detail in an appendix (4), and are sufficiently demonstrative of the capacity of the organisation in this particular

respect. Bearing in mind that the initial design of the Labour Representative Committee was chiefly that of an electoral instrument, these results should be studied from this point of view.

The political achievements of the Parliamentary Party, the effects of its work upon the life of the workers, and the promise it gives for the future have yet to be examined. The story of its numerical growth and financial backing is best told in the bald official figures which occur in its published documents. The following table shows the membership of the Party since its formation in January, 1900.

| | Trade Unions | | Trades Councils and L.R.C.'s. | | Socialist Soc's. | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | Membership. | No. | No. | Membership. | | Total. |
| 1900-1 ... | 41 | 353,070 ... | 7 ... | 3 | 22,861 ... | | 375,931 |
| 1901-2 ... | 65 | 455,450 ... | 21 ... | 2 | 13,861 ... | | 469,311 |
| 1902-3 ... | 127 | 847,315 ... | 49 ... | 2 | 13,835 ... | | 861,150 |
| 1903-4 ... | 165 | 956,025 ... | 76 ... | 2 | 13,775 ... | | 969,800 |
| 1904-5 ... | 158 | 885,270 ... | 73 ... | 2 | 14,730 ... | | 900,000 |
| 1905-6 ... | 158 | 904,496 ... | 73 ... | 2 | 16,784 ... | | 921,280 |
| 1906-7 ... | 176 | 975,182 ... | 83 ... | 2 | 20,885 ... | | 998,338 |
| 1907 ... | 181 | 1,049,673 ... | 92 ... | 2 | 22,267 ... | | 1,072,413 |
| 1908 ... | 172 | 1,121,256 ... | 133 ... | 2 | 27,465 ... | | 1,152,786 |

The financial limitations imposed upon the movement are of such a character as to leave one wondering—not that so much has been accomplished as that anything at all has been accomplished. The General Fund, the sources of which are chiefly affiliation fees, delegates fees, and sales of literature, is the fund from which the whole of the administrative and propaganda work is paid.

The total cost of this branch of the work for the nine years ending January, 1909, has been just over £11,000. Assuming the membership to be

a million only the cost per member per annum is about one-ninth of a farthing.

The Parliamentary fund, which provides for the maintenance of Members of Parliament at the rate of £200 per annum and the payment of 25 per cent. of returning officers' fees, was covered by a contribution of one penny per member per annum until 1907, when the contribution was raised to twopence. For the nine years ending January, 1909, the expenditure under these heads amounted to just over £24,000, a balance of £9,747 being carried forward.

If this movement had been the outcome of some spontaneous uprising of very poor men, its singular success might be attributed to the force of its enthusiasm. The fact, as we have seen, is that it has been slowly and patiently built in face of immemorial prejudice and mistaken faith in traditional fallacies, penurious grudging, and consequently meagre financial resources. It will be difficult for future generations to believe that it is criticised to-day because it is not perfect. Yet its bare existence as a factor in British public life is far more eloquent than its obvious and inevitable faults. It constitutes the only thoughtful organisation of working-class political aspiration for other than temporary or spasmodic reform that the world has ever witnessed. It is the greatest movement in history. If we look down the list of men who now "figurehead" the movement, as Parliamentary Representatives, we shall find many whose names occur in the old days as scoffing

antagonists. Some of them have shed their old-world pelts because they have astutely realised the potentialities for personal advancement which the Labour Party offers, but more of them, we may rejoice to believe, because they have caught its inspiration. It may be the same in all progressive movements until the end of time. Its borders are fringed with broken ambitions that express themselves in unreasoning vituperation and hatred, less of the cause than of the personalities that are associated with its inner life.

The Labour Party is the expression of despair of the old Trade Union method as much as of disgust with the old political parties. It means the development of Socialistic ideals through the very avenue which seemed least promising. It is a new Trade Unionism whose object is the achievement of a " more equitable Social order " through Parliamentary enactment. And instead of overriding the old Unionism it has wisely set to work to quicken the latent forces that lay within it and vitalise its inert mass with the spirit of a better belief. That it has placed thirty-one members in Parliament is the least important detail. That it has created an entirely new political force, that it has demonstrated Labour's capacity to govern and administer without middle class patronage or advice, that it has widened the civic outlook of the masses and set the workers on a sure road to a better order and a higher life : these are the triumphs that must reward it if its discipleship is marked by devotion, constancy, and courage.

## XV.

## THE END OF THE OLD ROAD.

BENEATH the inexorable force of economic pressure the old Trade Unionism has hopelessly broken down. The strike policy has been a ghastly failure. The stunted and poverty-stricken ideals of the orthodox Trade Union movement have become unrealisable. The virtual command of trade conditions has thinned down to a weak, equivocal voice in their regulation—a voice almost invariably silenced by the more strident mandate of the predominant partner.

Trade Unionism, until now, has had but one weapon, one line of attack and defence. The political activities in which the Unions have been figuring with varying degrees of prominence are no part of their original design, but simply outgrowths, stimulated almost entirely by the miserable futility of their orthodox effort. Their only weapon was some form of withholding labour. When negotiation effected the settlement of a trade dispute, its background and setting was always the strike, or the fear of the strike.

The strike is essentially an abortion. It is the disruption of the natural relation and contact of

Labour and the other factors of wealth production. Its doctrine is crudity itself. Its underlying idea, which never varies, is that by withholding Labour, Capitalism may be starved into subjection. The lockout is a strike of Capitalism against Labour—a simple reversal of the forces in conflict. Whatever form the strike may take, whether that of entire cessation of work, the stoppage of overtime, the partial closing or complete shutting down of factories or workshops, the object is always the same: the betterment, real or assumed, of the persons engaged in the dispute. Strikes for higher wages, shorter hours, against piecework or overtime, or any of the thousand actual or imaginary grievances of Labour; lockouts against any of these demands, or for the purpose of imposing the will of the employer upon the worker in any form, have all the same aspiration. It is the desire not always clearly defined, or even expressed, on the part of the workers to achieve industrial betterment. The ideal of the old Trade Unionist is just as low as this: that industrial betterment must be bounded by the possibilities of what the strike or the fear of the strike can wring from reluctant Capitalism.

As long as Capitalism remained unorganised there was always the possibility of some modified successes in this direction. The old strike policy held always such a measure of promise. The engineers gained the nine hours, and carried on a long and desperate struggle against piecework and the "two-lathe" system. Many are the instances of small and sometimes useful achievement

through the operation of the strike. But, year by year, the difficulties increased. Vast federations of the employing classes with perfect equipment, copying all that was most effective in the old Trade Union method and astutely eschewing all that experience had shown to be least effective, rose, challenged, fought, and defeated Labour. Against employers isolated and unorganised, the strike had succeeded. The Unions had been able to force up wages and hold a certain control over their industrial conditions. But a far more perfect organisation of the employers speedily reduced the strike policy to impotency. The lockout in action is an instrument of merciless destruction; the lockout in the background is a shadow of menace and terror. It is little wonder that against so deadly a weapon the strike would be effete and purposeless, and that the experience of those who have faced it should constitute a warning and a fear to the worker.

The trend of modern Trade Unionism is distinctly away from the strike method of industrial warfare. So far, this trend is but semi-conscious. Many influences are at work, however, developing a lively consciousness. Of these the most potent and searching is the restless and persistent propaganda of Socialism, which is swiftly and surely turning the organised workers from old fallacies to newer and broader truths. Besides this, there is the grim irony of fact that not even the stodgiest and most prejudiced of the old Trade Unionists can evade. Not any established Union is equipped

to resist a lockout. Not one can protect its members from the ruthless speeding-up of man and machinery which characterises modern productive systems; scarcely one but has been forced to forfeit the last vestige of control over the machine tools of its craft; not one that can regulate the hours of labour to the extent of creating a guarantee for all its people of the very elementary right to work at their own calling.

The old Trade Unionism of to-day is the survival of the new Trade Unionism of the "'fifties," and expresses now, as then, "the belief that the industrial and social betterment of the workers is achievable by the simple expedient of withholding labour." Its sheet anchor is the strike. Its justification or its condemnation must therefore be found in its actual results, and its actual results will be reflected in the condition of the working-class life it has created.

A glance at the general structure of the Trade Unionism of Great Britain will show that it is almost entirely composed of skilled and partly skilled workers. Of the 2,000,000 of organised workers more than two-thirds are highly skilled artisans; a considerable, though much smaller, proportion are semi-skilled, and a comparatively insignificant number are totally unskilled labourers.

It is the skilled workers, however, who form the great body of the Trade Union army, and whose present condition may be expressed by the living possibilities of 30s. a week when working and 7s. or 8s. a week when out of work. To produce

these results they have spent fifty millions of their own earnings, and have fought thousands of strikes. It is not remarkable that there should be a growing distrust of a method which has brought no better result.

Only where employers are isolated and unorganised will the strike bear the promise or the possibility of success in the future. Within the Trade Union Movement are defects and diseases which forbid the smallest hope of successful conflict, while armed with so poor and effete a weapon. Organised Capitalism will defeat Trade Unionism on the old lines every time the two come into hostile contact, whether it is done by opposing the lockout to the strike or by holding it in the background as an auxiliary to the farcical freedom of "collective bargaining." Collective bargaining is nothing but a delusive expansion of the old Manchester School doctrine of "freedom of contract." Without the strike or the lockout in the background it amounts only to this: that the workmen are collectively free to accept the conditions the employers collectively think fit to offer, or to collectively remain without employment until hunger on one side or financial anxiety on the other brings the parties to terms. You may multiply the numbers on either side as you will, the principle remains the same.

The strike in the background as a potent accessory to "collective bargaining" is nothing compared with the lockout utilised in a similar connection. The events of the last two years afford abundant evidence of this. A threat of a lockout

brought the great powerful Boiler-makers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders to their knees, and frightened them into the acceptance of terms which were utterly out of harmony with all their Trade Union traditions and policy. The vaguest hint of a lockout held up the North-East Coast Engineers, after a year's "collective bargaining" plus a long and bitter strike, for a trumpery advance of wages. The lockout of the Hemsworth Colliers after three years of unutterable misery ended, as the lockout must always end, in the total defeat of the workers. The strike of the Denton Hatters provoked the lockout as a counter-blast, and the lockout triumphed in seven weeks. Lockouts were threatened in all three sections of the cotton trade quite recently, and in each instance the workers made peace on disadvantageous terms to escape. When the cotton operatives defied the lockout disaster resulted. Workers are beginning to realise the position. It would be strange were it otherwise.

Distrust of the strike is a growing sentiment. But the growth of the sentiment is accompanied by a strange hesitancy to revoke the old faith and to revise the old policy. The conviction that the strike has ceased to be effective as a weapon of industrial warfare is most reluctantly admitted, however profoundly felt.

## XVI.

## THROUGH CHAOS TO ORDER.

The fear of the lockout and the heavy consciousness of the failure of the strike are not the only influences which are expediting the passing of the older fallacies. Undoubtedly the first cause of the failure of the old Trade Unionism is the squalid poverty of its ideal. The grotesque notion that a better social and industrial order can be achieved by simply raising wages or shortening hours is unimaginative, as well as fallacious. It takes no cognisance of the real cause of the evil it seeks to remedy. But, if we assume that the old Trade Unionism might conceivably lead the workers to a better order of life if comprehensively applied, it only remains to be said that an entire reconstruction and re-organisation must be effected before it can have any appreciable result upon the workers' condition for the better.

It is impossible for any entire industry and for few trades to make common cause. It is impossible to give even the semblance of coherence and common purpose to any great section of the organised workpeople. It is impossible to secure the adoption of a common policy or a common line

of action in industrial movements by any single industry.

A vivid consciousness of this anomalous state of things has led to attempts to lessen the sectional evil by the formation of federations which are supposed to cohere some of these volatile fragments. There are probably twenty or more of these federations. The Miners' County Associations are loosely federated, the furnishing trades, the shipbuilding and printing trades, and the various sections of the textile operatives. Besides these sectional federations, there is the General Federation of Trade Unions, to which something over half a million of workers subscribe. With the exception of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, none of these organisations appear to discharge any useful function. They have little or no influence in the direction of keeping the Unions in line for concerted action; the inevitable dissensions between the smaller Unions composing them, and the friction between the officials, is rather intensified than eased. Such an army, with no better weapon than the strike, can have little hope of victory. The impossibility of concentrating anything like an adequate force upon any effort for betterment is manifest. But beyond this tangle of disorganisation, there is the debilitating influence of internecine jealousy and distrust which the multiplicity of Unions engenders and accentuates.

The animosities of the Unions are chiefly traceable to their officialism. The great growth of sectionalism has brought with it a corresponding

increase of the permanent official element. By slow, almost imperceptible degrees, Trade Union officialism has become a profession, and its members a social caste. A distinct interest, growing curiously apart from the general interest of the rank and file, and drifting more and more widely away from democratic sentiment and practice, has evolved. It is most pathetic because it involves the misapplication of high capacity and great administrative aptitude. Certain it is that the average Trade Union official compares well with the average man in any walk of life in points of character, intellect, and ability. I am referring especially to the permanent paid secretaries, organisers, delegates, presidents, and executive councilmen of the Unions, not to the vast army of district officers who carry on the detail drudgery of the societies in their spare hours for trifling fees. The man who becomes a permanent official unconsciously develops a personal interest, which is distinct from his former interest in the society itself. This is perfectly natural, and quite inevitable, but it is none the less a potent factor in the general confusion of the movement.

Undoubtedly, the bulk of the difficulties in the way of better forms of Trade Union organisation are raised by the conflicting interests of the official leaders. Just as certainly, the rivalries and jealousies rife in the midst of the movement are attributable to the frequently conscious stimulus of interested officialism.

There is a peculiarly human aspect of this state

of affairs. Many of the smaller Unions owe their existence to the men who, as a matter of course, become their chief officials. The livings, if not luxurious, are usually superior to those experienced in industrial life. Besides the financial advantages, there is some element of social prominence and a sense of dignity and authority dear to most men. As a general rule this constitutes the chief difficulty, and makes it well-nigh impossible to bring about coalitions which would decrease the number of Unions which appear to exist for no purpose but that of providing a salary or several salaries for their officials.

The unskilled Labour Unions are notoriously kept asunder by the same influences. The actual growth of half the newer Unions is due to the same cause. Every attempt to reduce the evil—for evil it is—fails. The competent industrial organisation of the workers becomes hopeless; and, were the strike a competent weapon, there is no disciplined army to use it. Much more might be said concerning the mischief wrought by the petty intrigues of the host of small and relatively insignificant and useless Unions and their equally superfluous officials, but I have only in view a demonstration of the influences which account for the failure of the strike to accomplish the very limited mission involved in the old Trade Union creed. Criticisms of persons can hardly help us to correctly summarise actual results or future possibilities. When capable and astute men are hanging on to a species of vested interest and find it

necessary to foster animosity and wrath among the workers to give them a tighter grip, there remains no cause for wonder that Trade Unionism on the old lines has miserably failed as an instrument of industrial progress.

The vast majority of strikes terminate in favour of the employers or in compromise inimical to the interest of the workers. The stern logic of fact cannot be always ignored. Nearly all the great industrial conflicts of the past decade have been disastrous to the workers. The disorganisation of the employers is the only guarantee of partial success. Bitter as the lesson is and hard to learn, it is coming home to the slow-moving and prejudiced intelligence of the British Trade Unionist.

Trade Unionism and Socialism have a common origin and a common object. They are alike the children of the same sorrowing mother. Every Trade Unionist is, consciously or unconsciously, at one with the Socialist. Put the cases side by side and see how far they coincide, how much they have in common, and where and how much they differ:—

| TRADE UNIONISM | SOCIALISM |
| --- | --- |
| Implies a consciousness of social inequity. | Implies a consciousness of social inequity. |
| Recognises that such social inequity arises from the competitive conditions of society. | Recognises that such social inequity arises from the competitive conditions of society. |

| TRADE UNIONISM | SOCIALISM |
| --- | --- |
| Endeavours to rectify existing anomalies by collective action. | Endeavours to rectify existing anomalies by collective action. |
| Accepts a competitive basis of society as inevitable, and seeks to lighten its incidence by the application of purely industrial remedies, such as higher wages, reduced hours, or trade restrictions. | Repudiates the competitive basis of society and demands the reconstruction of society upon a co-operative basis. |
| METHOD: Any form of withholding labour. | METHOD: Independent political action of the workers. |

Out of the prodigious chaos of the Trade Union elements the Labour Party seeks to evolve order. That is its mission—that and to inculcate the honourable unselfishness which the old Unionism never taught or conceived. The Labour Party works through organised labour, not for the exclusive benefit of the "aristocracy of labour," but to humanise society and uplift its lowliest and weakest members.

## XVII.

## LEGISLATIVE RUDIMENTS.

The Labour Party is yet in the making. If it were a completed thing it might be righteously assailed for not achieving perfect results. Its legislative triumphs are necessarily modest, though by no means so small as to be negligible. Obviously, what has been done is not ascribable to the talent, eloquence, and virtue of the thirty men who now form its Parliamentary Group. The fact that all men recognise that behind it lies a great and growing national force, that its existence indicates an actual quickening of working-class thought and motive, are the reasons for all its successes.

For the first time in our history, grave social problems are being seriously discussed instead of being explained away or cynically ignored. Socialism as a remedy for social distempers is criticised and abused, but no longer derided. Poverty and unemployment, sweating, child labour, insanitation and physical deterioration have found a clamant voice in place of the plaintive whining which once characterised their supplications. Though of all the legislative results of the

past three or four years, not one but is inadequate and incomplete, every one bears the brand and impress of the new force.

The Trades Disputes Act, passed in the first session of the present Parliament, has been credited with a great deal more virtue than it deserves, but it is, nevertheless, a reform upon which the mass of the Trade Unionists had set their minds. And it did afford a demonstration of the potency of Independent Labour in Parliament. Much more useful were the amendments which were secured to the Workmen's Compensation Act in the same year. The Feeding of Necessitous Children and the Old Age Pensions Acts may be said to make up the sum of legislative reform for which the Labour Party may justly claim the major credit. Certain it is that none of them would be law to-day but for the presence in the House of a representation of Labour which, however small in itself, is recognised as the advance guard of a greater force to come.

That two attempts of the Labour Party to carry a drastic measure dealing with the monster wrong of unemployment have failed is attributable much more to a sense of security on the part of politicians who exaggerated the importance of recent internecine disturbances within the Party than to any lack of capacity or earnestness on the part of Labour men.

While it has to be admitted there is not, even yet, any declared proposal from either of the governing class parties, which goes to the root of

wrong, it is surely true that a forward tendency is being manifested, both by an orthodox Government and an orthodox Opposition. Every advanced proposal of the present Liberal Government, including the measures for Trade Boards and Labour Exchanges, and the more strident elements of this year's Budget are all more or less reflections of Labour Party faith. More than any other constituent of the House of Commons, the Labour Party has helped to steady the public pulse and the national conscience and strengthen the workers against the insidious approaches of war-mongering jingoes and Tariff Reformers. The economics of Colney Hatch and the politics of Pandemonium have a lesser potency than they once had. People did not look for or expect this before the advent of the Labour Party, and no one will seriously suggest that such tendencies would have shown themselves had no Labour Party existed. We have the records of more than half a century of Liberal and Tory Government to dispel any credulous illusion that reforms are effected or even proposed by the classes through love for the masses.

It is probable that more might have been done. Opportunities may have been missed, blunders have been committed. Thirty archangels might have done more and might have done it better. Had these men been wise enough to accept all the valuable advice and guidance so generously offered to them, they might possibly have escaped the violent denunciations of their critics—though even

that is doubtful. Possessing many of the faults and frailties common to humanity, subject to personal limitations as well as to limitations imposed upon them by their new and unaccustomed environment, their work has been imperfect.

The one important achievement, apart from the small legislative results referred to, has been the actual creation of a workers' party in Parliament, accepted and recognised as an independent political force. The preceding pages have shown the slow and tedious stages of its development. As it stands to-day the Parliamentary Party reflects and represents the mass of the old Trade Unionism quickened with the brighter idealism of Socialist faith. In the nature of things it cannot be a "pure and flawless crystal." Its infirmities are so natural and so obvious that the wonder is that its critics have missed sight of them and have directed all their shafts against the personal demerits or mistakes of the Parliamentary figure-heads.

The establishment of the Labour Party in Parliament was not actually accomplished until 1906. Prior to that year the political representation of Labour was too nebulous to deserve the name of a "Party." A little more than three years has brought four political achievements at least, the value of each of which is out of sight in advance of any previous result of Trade Union political policy. Such values are best estimated in the light of comparison; and assuming that the four items mentioned constitute the entire record of the Party, we have but to compare them with

the results of previous working-class political efforts in order to gauge their worth.

Alexander McDonald thus outlines his own political objective:—

> It was in 1856 that I crossed the Border first, to advocate a better Mines Act, true weighing, the education of the young, the restriction of the age to twelve years, the reduction of the working hours to eight in every twenty-four, the training of managers, the payment of wages weekly in current coin of the realm, no truck, and many other useful things too numerous to mention here.

More than fifty years have passed, and to-day this programme is unfulfilled. Remember, too, that its items are chiefly directed to the amelioration of one particular industry. Less than ten years of independent activity puts Labour in possession of reforms which outweigh in importance and benefit the total results of more than fifty years of effort interpreted through Labour Representation under Liberal patronage. The miners, under the guidance of their old chiefs, have hitherto held aloof from the Labour Party, but will be participants in its work hereafter. The entrance of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain has already been arranged for, and the last reliable prop of Liberal-Labourism has been removed. No appreciable section of the Trade Union mass is now outside the movement. If the Labour Party has not fulfilled the most ardent expectations, it has justified its existence.

It has come to stay!

## XVIII.

## LABOUR IN PARLIAMENT.

More than a century of incessant strife has won for Labour little material gain. The old industrial methods have been tested and have failed.

There is no evil from which the workers suffer that is not buttressed by evil laws or flourishes because of the absence of a good law. It is upon law-making that human progress depends. The mass of the people who have the most to gain by reform and the most to suffer by default of reform must seek to control the machinery of law making. The Labour Party is no more or less than the embodiment of this idea. It transfers from the factory gate to the House of Commons the struggle for a "more equitable social order."

Parliament, as it exists to-day, is not the most facile instrument imaginable. Its uses have been perverted and its possibilities remain undeveloped. The work of the Labour Movement is not merely to capture the legislature, but to make it serviceable. The first involves a long row to hoe, the second a longer. Parliament presents the surpris-

ing anomaly of an institution capable of infinite good work, yet by custom and misuse concentrated more upon preventing than effecting reform. Regarded as a human organisation, it has a profound and abiding reverence for itself and for nothing else. If it ever had a heart, that has petrified. It adores its traditions, its senseless pomps and ritual. Its insufferable vulgarity and offensive bad manners are glossed over with seemingly courteous formulas and ceremonial. Age, honour, service, and wisdom do not count. It is deranged with an ignoble lust for having its ears tickled with oratorical smartness, and its taste is about as cultured as that of a variety show audience. Mr. Harold Cox has furbished up the rusty platitudes of the Manchester School and has invested them with a curious glitter, and the House listens with unconcealed delight. Yet, this present session, it has kicked Manchesterism to flinders. The House listens to Mr. Cox, not because it agrees with him, but simply because he lectures it audaciously and utters his economic distortions brilliantly and cleverly.

It bows submissively to the ruling of its president, called Mr. Speaker. That is solely because Mr. Speaker is its own creation and part of itself. If Mr. Speaker were appointed by the King, or the Lords, or by a plebiscite of the whole Empire, or by the endorsement of all three, he would not command an atom of respect or deference. Some unwritten law makes it imperative that a "front bench" man must be deferred and listened to with

respectful attention, but the House can be as rude as it likes to anyone else. I have seen a venerable man standing without a single member of his own party to give him countenance and support, and the few members remaining in their seats engaged in personal conversation so loud as to entirely drown the old man's voice. If a speaker, whose style is not the vogue, rises, the House gets up and walks out with ostentatious insolence, but comes crawling back when the indicators show that some more important or popular member is "up."

About seven-tenths of the Parliamentary session is absorbed by the consideration of financial matters. Yet every session is heralded with a long programme of legislation, some of which is begun, some of whch never gets any further than mention in the King's Speech, and most of which is scrapped towards the end of the session. If the whole course of business were deliberately arranged to waste time it could not be more perfectly contrived. Seven or eight separate debates on the Budget give facilities for vain and irritating repetitions, which practically absorb the session from April until the autumn.

The House of Commons has no soul; it is a flunkey; it sits and swelters through the dog days —not because that is the season for work, but because "society" decrees that birds must be massacred in the autumn and the British climate is too austere during the winter. In deference to "society" the legislators squeeze into a stuffy,

smelly, ill-ventilated, badly-lighted, and inconvenient chamber just when they might more conveniently be elsewhere, and rise just at a time they might more profitably begin work. But membership confers a high social distinction; it is a good club and a strange glamour environs it in spite of its many vanities and defects. It is not what Parliament is, but what Parliament might be made to be that matters.

It was into this place, with its magic fascination and its mysterious dignity, that thirty working men found themselves projected. That most of them were even more surprised than their new colleagues, is certain. Only four of them had any previous experience of Parliamentary life and work. One had barely time to brush the saw-dust of a carpenter's shop from his raiment before he found himself the victor over one of the proudest lords in the land, and a legislative dignitary. A few had some slight records of local administrative work, and most of them have had to divide their attention between Parliament and the routine functions of Trade Union officialism.

People who knew nothing of the long and weary labours of which this handful of working-men politicians was but the first actual and visible outgrowth, were astonished. The Labour Party made the best newspaper copy for some months. The men were interviewed, flattered, and extolled beyond their simple claims to praise. Their friends expected them to produce, instanter, the social revolution and to set working the legislative

machine, every wheel of which was clogged and creaky with the accumulations of centuries. Their simple and modest achievements were absurdly exaggerated, and their small virtues puffed into the attributes of genius.

They failed to satisfy the impatient and thoughtless—they failed in nothing else. They did what they were sent to do: they formed an independent political force and justified any temperate and rational claim that could be made upon them. Nobody has ever allowed them a fair discount for their natural human infirmity.

They are said to be more concerned with the cultivation of Parliamentary deportment than with social reconstruction—the more prominent and capable among them are but duplicates of the old files of the Broadhurst and Burns type, and have eyes on the same goal—as if it mattered. If it could be proved to demonstration that one half of them are hopeless incompetents and the other half self-seeking humbugs a case has been made for blowing the whole thirty out—but not a case for abandoning the principle and policy which they represent, however imperfectly. They have accurately reflected the will and the sentiment of the rank and file of the movement—if, indeed, they are not ahead of it. They have shown that, as a legislator and governor, the working-class Jack is at least as good as his master—that statecraft is no sacred mystery and its art the natural monopoly of no restricted class.

Personal virtues or frailties are of little concern.

As the workers develop so will their spokesmen and leaders. I could fill a book bigger than this with criticisms, every one at least as relevant as any that have yet been levelled against these men. It would be of little service.

Look back over three-quarters of a century, through which organised Labour has toiled towards the light. *Is this the right road?* is the question that must concern us—not whether perfect virtue, honour, and ability are the attributes either of the creators or the creations of the movement.

## XIX.

## CONCLUSION.

THE history of the Labour Party has yet to be written. This little book does but conclude its preliminary chapter, and as it goes to press the shadows of coming strife gather round. All the writer can hope for or claim is that he has shown whence and how Labour has come thus far. The future is a fabric that after-hands must fashion. Strange as it will appear to students of our movement hereafter, to-day's imminent trouble is not insecurity of grip upon the sentiment of the workers, but the rather sordid question of the legality of Trade Union participation in political activity. Because this trouble is essentially a part of the story of the Labour movement its causes and origin must be told.

Not law, but legalism, has ever been the foe of progress. It is a startling commentary upon our processes to say that efforts sanctioned by statute and sanctified by decades of practice can be suddenly rendered illegal by judicial interpretations which appear to have little justification upon grounds either of common sense or equity. In the case of the Taff Vale judgment, rights which

had been freely exercised for thirty years were suddenly and strangely illegalised. Now the right of a Trade Union to take part in political work is challenged.

How desperate a peril is involved in the simple existence of a Labour Party the sudden invocation of the law demonstrates. For behind it there is the power of wealth and the fear of Labour armed at last with a keen and effective weapon.

On July 22nd, 1908, in the High Court, the case of Osborne *v.* the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants was opened before Mr. Justice Neville. The plaintiff, W. V. Osborne, was the secretary of the Walthamstow Branch of the Society and a working railway servant. The suggestion that a man in such a position could bring such an action in such a Court is obviously grotesque. But his claim was, in effect, that the spending of Trade Union money upon political effort was *ultra vires* of the Trade Union.

Mr. Justice Neville dismissed the application, concluding his judgment with the following remarks:—

"Therefore it seems to me that the Trade Unions, if they please, are at liberty just as much to affiliate themselves to and to support the Socialist Party as they would be to affiliate to and support, if they pleased, either the Unionist Party or the Liberal Party; and, as I said before, once given the right to spend their money to promote their interests in the House of Commons, I think

the question of how they could do so is purely a question of policy with which the courts will not concern themselves.

"I, therefore, come to the conclusion that the rule as amended is not *ultra vires* of the Union, and that the action fails, and, I suppose, must be dismissed with costs."

The powers behind the lay figure, Osborne, carried the case to the Court of Appeal, where, on November 28th, 1908, the Master of the Rolls and Justices Fletcher Moulton and Farnell reversed the decision of Justice Neville and decided that the official expenditure of Trade Union money in political work is *ultra vires* and illegal.

The case has been carried to the House of Lords by the society, and was heard just prior to the long vacation this year (1909).

The judgment of the Law Lords—Halsbury, James, Shaw, Atkinson, and McNaughten—is awaited, it seems to me, with more anxiety than the circumstances warrant. Whether the legal decision of the supreme legal authorities is favourable or adverse to our position it can have no more than a transient effect upon the Labour Party. It may temporarily retard—it cannot wreck or even injure the movement. Whatever the decision is, it must eventually stimulate and strengthen the Labour cause.

The preceding pages have shown how slow and painful has been the progress. The Labour Party is no house built upon the sands. An adverse decision of the Law Lords would present no

serious difficulty in itself. If organised Labour is without faith in itself the whole edifice would crumble away without the hostility of the law. If the faith is there—and I believe it is—all the law in the land will never disturb it. The hands that set up and fostered the Coming Force can keep it erect and the faith that quickened it will uphold it against the world.

These legal proceedings afford a striking and effective justification of the Labour Party. The growing influences of political Labour possess a terror to the wealthy classes comparable to their terror of the strike before it had ceased to be a power in industrial life. Though the identity of the persons behind the nominal plaintiff may never be disclosed and need not arouse the smallest concern to-day, it is abundantly clear that, whoever they are, they are persons whose first and last intent is to cripple the political power of Labour. Whether they be Liberals or Tories, or a happy and equal blend of both, certain it is that members of the traditional "friends of the people" parties have prompted these proceedings.

Such a trumpery barrier as a legal decision may set up will be contemptuously swept away. There must be no faltering—no turning back. Traitors within and foes without are but incidents of a conflict that neither can determine or prolong.

Weeks ago, when I spoke to the man to whom this book is dedicated and asked him what he thought would be the effect of a hostile decision, he laughed and said, "It doesn't matter!" It is

that contempt of danger and difficulty that has made the story of a great and useful life. It is that will make the story of great and useful cause.

I have told this story—how imperfectly I know. It is but a later chapter in the history of Labour's long march towards freedom. The trials and perils that lie ahead are heavily foreshadowed even as I write. These are to be faced and overcome. The light is yet beyond.

From the darkness of the grave itself rings out the clarion voice of Labour's truest and sweetest singer:—

"Come then, let us cease all fooling and put by peace and rest,
*For the cause alone is worthy*—till the good days bring the best.
Ah, come! let us cease all fooling, for this at least we know:
That the dawn and the day *are* coming—and forth the banners go!"

## Appendix I.

*Statement of the Provisional Committee of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Feb., 1834 :—*

The Committee having laid before the meeting their propositions and suggestions, would now offer a few words of congratulation to their brother labourers on the cheering prospects which are presented to us by the rapid progress of our cause. Who is there amongst us who can witness the steady march of united millions pressing onward to the long-wished-for goal of liberty, prosperity, and happiness, without feelings of delight and pride? For the first time in the history of the world we see men awakening to a true sense of their dignity and power—men who but a short time since were unconscious of either, who knew not that their labour was the mine of wealth from which society derived all the principal necessaries, comforts, and luxuries of civilised life—but who had foolishly looked upon the produce of their toil as "Forbidden fruit," which it would be presumptuous in them ever to think of enjoying. At length their eyes are opened. They no longer imagine themselves as ordained by nature to be the slavish drudges of society, doomed to incessant toil, not to satisfy their own reasonable wants, but the vitiated extravagance of the non-producers, or, those whom they have mistakenly called their "betters." No longer will the working man be told that there must be "lower orders in society." The truth is out!

They know that all men are equal in the eyes of nature, and that all have an equal right to her spontaneous bounties. They intensely feel, too, that they have hitherto lived in wretchedness, anxiety, and want, once deemed unavoidable, but which they are now aware it is within their own control to change for a happy life of exemption from poverty and its fear, and from a degrading dependency upon those who have so long revelled in all the good things of the world at the expense of the working classes, and who now have the unfeeling arrogance to tell the latter, with scornful contempt, that they will never be able to accomplish the object of their Union. Yes, brethren, be assured that our enemies calculate upon our downfall from those evil causes which, had our "pastors and masters" been wise they would have long since

removed from amongst us, our lack of knowledge and refinement. "Give the mechanics and labourers more time on their hands," say they with a sneer, "and it will be spent in the pothouse. Give them a management of their own affairs, and their want of prudence, foresight, and order will soon precipitate them again to their proper level—the bottom of the social scale!"

Misjudging men! How cruel and undeserved are your sarcasms! The Committee will not, however, attempt to raise the fire of indignation against those who have now a direct interest in opposing us, believing that they act more from ignorance than from any real malignity against their fellow creatures. But they would earnestly call upon their brethren here assembled, nobly to resolve before they depart to their homes upon such measures as, after calm inquiry and full investigation shall seem best fitted to give the working men of this Kingdom their just rights and the full reward of their industry, and putting an end to the necessity of competing with each other in the disposal of their labour to the non-producers as, until that be done, they may in vain expect to be more than partially relieved from their distresses—in fine, to resolve upon such measures as shall offer and afford to the productive classes a complete emancipation from the tyranny of capital and monopoly.

Let us then, brethren, set about these things in right earnest, and this committee verily believe that there are many parties, even among the wealthy, who, though our indecision keeps them aloof now, are quite ready to fall in with our ranks, and give us the aid of their riches and talents, the moment they see us determined on our ends and faithful to each other.

NOTE—The last paragraph obviously has reference to Robert Owen.

## Appendix II.

*Exracts from Employers' Federation Manifesto, Dec. 11th, 1873:—*

Few are aware of the strength, compactness of organisation, large resources, and great influence of the Trade Unions. They have their annual Congresses, at which an increasing number of Unions are represented each year. Last year, at the Congress held at Leeds, nearly 700,000 unionists were represented, and since then their power has been largely developed.

They have a well-paid and ample staff of leaders, most of them experienced in the command of strikes, many of them skilful as organisers, all forming a class apart, a profession with interests distinct, though not necessarily antagonistic, to those of the workpeople they lead, but from their very *raison d'etre* hostile to those of the employers and the rest of the community.

They have, through their command of money, the imposing aspect of their organisation, and partly also from the mistaken humanitarian

aspirations of a certain number of literary men of good standing, a large array of literary talent, which is prompt in their service on all the occasions of controversy. They have their own press as a field for their exertions. Their writers have free access to some of the leading London journals.

They organise frequent meetings, at which paid speakers inoculate the working classes with their ideas, *and urge them to dictate terms to candidates for Parliament. They exercise a pressure upon members of Parliament and those aspiring to that honour, out of all proportion to their real power, and beyond belief excepting to those who have had the opportunity of witnessing its effects.*

They have a standing Parliamentary Committee, and a programme, and active members of Parliament are energetic in their service.

They have the attentive ear of the Ministry of the day, and their communications are received with instant care and attention.

The necessary and legitimate result of this powerful organisation, of the sacrifices, pecuniary and otherwise, which the workpeople make in its support, of the skilful and ceaseless energy with which it is directed, must be to give it to a large extent the control of the elections and consequently of Parliament; the power to dictate terms everywhere between employers and employed and the mastery over the independence of the workmen as well as over the operations of the employers.

This course of procedure tends not only to secure the permanence of their special order, *but to gratify the not unnatural ambition of several of them to obtain seats in Parliament* as advocates of the policy of the Unions.

To supply the want which the preceding statement clearly indicates—to acquire Parliamentary influence, which is indispensable if legislation is not to become restrictive and destructive in its operation upon our industry—are the peculiar objects of the National Federation of Associated Employers. It will have its efficient literary staff, ever watchful and ready in defence of its policy. It will have extensive communication with the Press. It will examine and take such measures as are necessary with reference to every Parliamentary proposal. It will be its duty "to watch over," with a view to influence all legislation affecting industrial questions and the relations of employers and employed.

## Appendix III.

*First Report of the Labour Representation Committee.*

3, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W.C.
*July 19th*, 1900.

DEAR MR. WOODS,

I am very much obliged for your letter of the 17th inst. asking me to draw up a brief account of the work of my committee for the

information of the Congress. The following points appear to me to cover the most important work we have done up to the present. You will, of course, remember that we only came into existence late in February, and the starting of such a committee as ours takes, I find, a long time.

### (1) Invitation to Trade Unions.

We printed an official report of the Conference and issued it, together with a letter explaining the purposes of the Committee, to all the Trade Unions with a membership of over 500, and to several with a smaller membership—altogether we have circulated over 4,000 copies of our report amongst members of Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies.

### (2) Membership.

At this date we have 232,000 affiliated members, not counting the membership of two or three Trades Councils that have come in. Several of the large Unions like the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Boot and Shoe Operatives, etc., are now taking the opinion of their members upon affiliation with us, so that the probabilities are that in the course of the year we shall have at least doubled our membership.

### (3) Deputation.

The Committee feels that its first important task is to get at the Trade Unions of the country, and with this end in view it was arranged to attend Trade Union Executive meetings, meetings of Trade Union Delegates, etc. In this way we have attended a large Trade Union Delegate meeting in Leeds, the North Yorkshire and Cleveland Miners' Association, the Manchester Trades Council, the Sheffield Trades Council, and Trades Councils all over the country.

### (4) Political Action.

The Committee has considered at its several meetings suggestions regarding what it should do with reference to candidates, but at the present time no decision has been come to. Seeing that scarcely a week has passed since the Committee was started, without some material addition to its affiliated membership, and that this question of political activity is the most important that the Committee will have to settle, it has been unwilling to come to any hasty decision, but information is being accumulated from all over the country which will, we believe, make that decision, when it is arrived at, acceptable to all the sections represented on the Committee.—With kindest regards, Yours very truly,

J. R. MacDonald.

Mr. Samuel Woods.

# Appendix IV.

## DETAILED RECORD OF THE LABOUR PARTY'S ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES.

### GENERAL ELECTION, 1900.

| Constituency. | Candidate. | Opponents. | Labour vote. | Total vote polled. | Representation before contest. | Representation after contest. | Remarks. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Derby | R. Bell | 2 Cons. | 7,640 | 15,000 | 2 Cons. | 1 Lab. and 1 Lib. | Liberals ran one man and co-operated |
| Merthyr | J. Keir Hardie | 2 Libs. | 5,745 | 13,000 | 2 Libs. | 1 Lab. and 1 Lib. | Trades Council loyally helped |
| Gower (Glam.) | J. Hodge | 1 Lib. | 3,853 | 8,129 | 1 Lib. | 1 Lib. | Straight fight between Liberal and Labour |
| Sunderland | A. Wilkie | 2 Cons. | 8,842 | 19,102 | 1 Lib. and 1 Con. | 2 Cons. | Liberals co-operated |
| West Ham | W. Thorne | 1 Con. | 4,439 | 10,054 | 1 Con. | 1 Con. | Vote inc. 460 |
| Blackburn | P. Snowden | 2 Cons. | 7,096 | 18,000 | 2 Cons. | 2 Cons. | Liberals partly co-operated |
| Bradford | F. Jowett | 1 Con. | 4,949 | 9,939 | 1 Con. | 1 Con. | Liberals did not officially co-operate |
| Halifax | J. Parker | 2 Libs. and 1 Con. | 3,276 | 13,000 | 1 Lib. and 1 Con. | 1 Lib. and 1 Con. | Labour organisations helped; both Liberals and Conservatives opposed |
| Leicester | J. R. MacDonald | 2 Libs. and 1 Con. | 4,164 | 18,000 | 2 Libs. | 1 Lib. and 1 Con. | Trades Council supported Broadhurst and MacDonald. Increased vote 160 |
| Manchester, S.W. | F. Brocklehurst | 1 Con. | 2,398 | 6,415 | 1 Con. | 1 Con. | Liberals did not co-operate |
| Preston | J. Keir Hardie | 2 Cons. | 4,834 | 11,500 | 2 Cons. | 2 Cons. | Increased vote 53 |
| Bow and Bromley | Geo. Lansbury | 1 Con. | 2,558 | 6,961 | 1 Con. | 1 Con. | Increased vote 435 |
| Ashton-u-Lyne | J. Johnston | 1 Lib. and 1 Con. | 737 | 6,100 | 1 Con. | 1 Con. | Increased vote 322 |
| Leeds, East | W. P. Byles | 1 Lib. and 1 Con. | 1,266 | 6,305 | 1 Lib. | 1 Con. | Affiliated T. C. endorsed candidature |
| Rochdale | A. Clarke | 1 Lib. and 1 Con. | 901 | 11,290 | 1 Con. | 1 Con. | Decreased vote 350 |

### By-Elections, 1902.

P. Snowden contested Wakefield, and polled 1,979 against 2,960 votes cast for the Tory candidate.

Later in the same year D. J. Shackleton was returned unopposed for the Clitheroe division of Lancashire.

## By-Elections, 1903.

WOOLWICH.

| | |
|---|---|
| Crooks (L.R.C.) | 8,687 |
| Drage (Unionist) | 5,458 |
| Majority | 3,229 |

PRESTON.

| | |
|---|---|
| J. Kerr (Unionist) | 8,639 |
| J. Hodge (L.R.C.) | 6,490 |

BARNARD CASTLE.

| | |
|---|---|
| Henderson (L.R.C.) | 3,370 |
| Vane (Unionist) | 3,323 |
| Beaumont (Liberal) | 2,809 |

NORWICH.

| | |
|---|---|
| Tillet (Liberal) | 8,576 |
| Wild (Unionist) | 6,756 |
| G. H. Roberts (L.R.C.) | 2,440 |

## By-Elections, 1904.

There were no by-elections during 1904 in which official L.R.C. candidates took part, but the assistance and endorsement of the party was given to Miners' candidatures with the following results :—

N.E. LANARK.

| | |
|---|---|
| Findlay (Liberal) | 5,619 |
| Touch (Unionist) | 4,677 |
| J. Robertson (Labour) | 3,984 |

W. MONMOUTH.

| | |
|---|---|
| T. Richards (Labour) | 7,995 |
| Cockburn (Tariff Reformer) | 3,360 |

## By-Election, 1905.

N. BELFAST.

| | |
|---|---|
| Dixon (Conservative) | 4,440 |
| Walker (L.R.C.) | 3,966 |

## GENERAL ELECTION, 1906.—Labour Results.

| Constituency. | Candidates and Polls. | Labour Votes. 1900. | 1906. |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Successful Candidates :* | | | |
| Barnard Castle | A. Henderson | 3,370* | 5,540 |
| Barrow-in-Furness | C. Duncan | ... | 5,167 |
| Blackburn | Philip Snowden | 7,096 | 10,282 |
| Bolton | A. H. Gill | ... | 10,416 |
| Bradford, W. | F. W. Jowett | 4,949 | 4,957 |
| Chatham | J. H. Jenkins | ... | 6,692 |
| Clitheroe | D. J. Shackleton | ... | 12,035 |
| Deptford | C. W. Bowerman | ... | 6,236 |
| Dundee | A. Wilkie | ... | 6,833 |
| Glasgow (Blackfriars) | G. N. Barnes | ... | 3,284 |
| Gorton | J. Hodge | ... | 8,566 |
| Halifax | J. Parker | 3,276 | 8,937 |
| Ince | S. Walsh | ... | 8,046 |
| Leeds, E. | J. O'Grady | 1,266 | 4,299 |
| Leicester | J. R. MacDonald | 4,164 | 14,685 |
| Manchester, N.E. | J. R. Clynes | ... | 5,386 |
| Manchester, S.W. | G. D. Kelley | 2,398 | 4,101 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | J. Keir Hardie | 5,745 | 10,187 |
| Newcastle-on-Tyne | W. Hudson | ... | 18,869 |
| Newton, Lancs. | J. A. Seddon | ... | 6,434 |
| Norwich | G. H. Roberts | 2,440† | 11,059 |
| Preston | J. T. Macpherson | 4,834‡ | 10,181 |
| St. Helens | T. Glover | ... | 6,088 |
| Sunderland | T. Summerbell | 8,842 | 13,430 |
| Stockport | G. J. Wardle | ... | 7,319 |
| Woolwich | W. Crooks | 8,687‖ | 9,026 |
| West Ham, S. | W. Thorne | 4,439 | 10,198 |
| Wolverhampton, W. | T. F. Richards | ... | 6,767 |
| West Houghton, Lancs. | W. T. Wilson | ... | 9,262 |

* By-Election, 1903. † By-Election, 1904. ‡ Poll at By-Election, 1903, 6,490.
‖ By-Election, 1903.

## *General Election, 1906—cont.*

| Constituency. | Candidates and Polls. | Labour Votes. 1900. | 1906. |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Unsuccessful Candidates :* | | | |
| Belfast, N. | W. Walker | ... | 4,616 |
| Birmingham (Bordesley) | J. B. Glasier | ... | 3,976 |
| Birmingham, East | J. Holmes | ... | 5,343 |
| Croydon | S. Stranks | ... | 4,007 |
| Darlington | I. H. Mitchell | ... | 4,087 |
| Dewsbury | B. Turner | ... | 2,629 |
| Eccles, Lancs. | B. Tillett | ... | 3,985 |
| Glasgow (Camlachie) | J. Burgess | ... | 2,568 |
| Govan | J. Hill | ... | 4,212 |
| Gravesend | Jas. Macpherson | ... | 873 |
| Grimsby | T. Proctor | ... | 2,248 |
| Huddersfield | T. R. Williams | ... | 5,813 |
| Jarrow | Pete Curran | ... | 5,093 |
| Leeds, South | A. Fox | ... | 4,030 |
| Liverpool (Kirkdale) | J. Conley | ... | 3,157 |
| Liverpool (Toxteth) | J. Sexton | ... | 2,952 |
| Monmouth Boroughs | J. Winstone | ... | 1,678 |
| Portsmouth | W. S. Sanders | ... | 8,172 |
| Stockton | F. H. Rose | ... | 2,710 |
| Wakefield | Stanton Coit | ... | 2,086 |
| York | G. H. Stuart | ... | 4,573 |
| *Constituencies contested by L.R.C. Candidates in 1900 but not in 1906 :* | | | |
| Ashton-under-Lyne | J. Johnston | 737 | ... |
| Bow and Bromley | G. Lansbury | 2,558 | ... |
| Gower | J. Hodge | 3,853 | ... |
| Rochdale | A. Clarke | 901 | ... |
| | Totals | 75,500 | 323,195 |

TOTAL SUMMARIES FOR ABOVE CONSTITUENCIES.

| | |
|---|---|
| Total Votes Polled by all Parties | 859,518 |
| Votes Polled by L.R.C. Candidates | 323,195 |
| Percentage Polled by L.R.C. Candidates | 37 per cent. |
| Increase of Total L.R.C. Vote since 1900 | 247,695 |

## By-Elections, 1906.

COCKERMOUTH.

| | |
|---|---|
| Randles (Unionist) | 4,593 |
| Guest (Liberal) | 3,903 |
| Smillie (Labour) | 1,436 |

HUDDERSFIELD.

| | |
|---|---|
| Sherwell (Liberal) | 5,762 |
| Russell Williams (Labour) | 5,422 |
| Foster Fraser (Unionist) | 4,844 |

## By-Elections, 1907.

N. BELFAST.

| | |
|---|---|
| Clarke (Unionist) | 6,021 |
| Walker (Labour) | 4,194 |

JARROW.

| | |
|---|---|
| Curran (Labour) | 4,698 |
| Rose-Innes (Unionist) | 3,930 |
| Hughes (Liberal) | 3,474 |
| O'Hanlon (Nationalist) | 2,122 |

KIRKDALE.

| | |
|---|---|
| McArthur (Unionist) | 4,000 |
| Hill (Labour) | 3,330 |

W. HULL.

| | |
|---|---|
| Wilson (Liberal) | 5,623 |
| Bartley (Unionist) | 5,382 |
| Holmes (Labour) | 4,512 |

## By-Elections, 1908.

S. LEEDS.

| | |
|---|---|
| Middlebrook (Liberal) | 5,274 |
| Neville (Unionist) | 4,915 |
| Fox (Labour) | 2,457 |

DEWSBURY.

| | |
|---|---|
| Runciman (Liberal) | 5,594 |
| Boyd-Carpenter (Unionist) | 4,078 |
| Turner (Labour) | 2,446 |

DUNDEE.

| | |
|---|---|
| Churchill (Liberal) | 7,079 |
| Baxter (Unionist) | 4,370 |
| Stuart (Labour) | 4,014 |
| Scrymgeour (Prohibitionist) | 655 |

MONTROSE BURGHS.

| | |
|---|---|
| Harcourt (Liberal) | 3,083 |
| Burgess (Labour) | 1,937 |
| Constable (Unionist) | 1,576 |

## By-Elections, 1909.

TAUNTON.

| | |
|---|---|
| Peel (Unionist) | 1,976 |
| Smith (Labour) | 1,085 |

CROYDON.

| | |
|---|---|
| Hermon Hodge (Unionist) | 11,989 |
| Raphael (Liberal) | 8 041 |
| Smith (Labour) | 886 |

ATTERCLIFFE.

| | |
|---|---|
| Pointer (Labour) | 3,581 |
| King-Farwell (Uinonist) | 3,330 |
| Lambert (Liberal) | 3,175 |
| Muir Wilson (Unionist) | 2,803 |

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