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Parliament and Reconstruction:

A Plea and a Plan.

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BY

OSCAR M. WIHL, B.A., LL.B.,

Of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister-at-Law.

“The autocracy of individuals is something of a myth, and the real enemy to civilisation, as it is also the real parent of militarism, is the autocracy of the State, which is not confined to the Central Empires and their Allies.”

A. F. POLLARD (*League of Nations*, p. 12).

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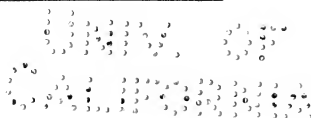
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PREFATORY NOTE.

SINCE the following pages were written we have seen Glasgow and Belfast held by armed forces, as though they were bridge-heads on the Rhine. The affairs of London have been more dislocated than by any series of the air-raids. North and South, East and West, there are ominous mutterings and rumblings. "A reaction from the strain of the War," one sapient public adviser assures us is the cause. Another, equally intelligent, tells us "it is all the work of a comparatively few paid agitators." One has to believe that the readers of the daily press accept such explanations—and one has to believe this, and sad and disheartened, wonder how the scales can be removed from eyes so blind, the stoppers from ears so deaf. Have not the signs been made manifest for long years past? Was the message of the slum undecipherable? Had the Police Court, the Asylum, the Workhouse no voice? Could the ever-growing acceptance—not confined to manual labour—of State theories subversive of our present order convey no lesson? Had those responsible for the management and control of our Industrial System made a generous response—and more important, a willing and sympathetic response—to the demand of Labour for a fairer share? It would almost appear that those upon whom these questions make no imperative demand for answers—answers open and honest and after self-interrogation—are ignorant that *rights* of property are social products. They are not established by natural law. Questioned by those upon whom the corresponding *duties* fall, they are to be vindicated only by their justice. Such people may speak of

“our country,” but they mean “my possessions, my trade, my class, my pleasures.” They are sadly backward in social development.

All this recent upheaval adds point and force to the Plea contained in the following pages for such Reform of our political institutions and practices as shall remove—so far as possible—the distrust of the Parliamentary process. And these same events should at least win a consideration of the Plan proposed for a Reformed Parliament. To those habituated to the party struggle the proposals will at first seem wildly impractical. I would beg even from such for further thought. Something *must* be found which shall give us Self-Government in place of Government by a secret autocratic Cabinet. Failing something better to commence upon why should not the Plan I suggest be made the starting point for the careful working out of the requisite machinery of Government? Correct its defects, make good its omissions, amplify its generalities into working and workable details. Reject it altogether and put something better in its place. But let us at least face the real facts of the day, cease from our idolatrous worship of precedent, turn our lip-service of democracy into an honest effort to provide the means, the instruments through which it can alone be realised, by which it can alone operate. To attempt Reconstruction and allow the “Party Circus” to dazzle and deafen is a mockery. To fail in Reconstruction in To-day’s circumstances and after Yesterday’s experiences is to risk a To-morrow of long and vain regret.

OSCAR M. WIHL.

Manchester, January, 1919.

Parliament and Reconstruction.

INTRODUCTORY.

“ I cannot think that the gentlemen of England can be content to be made mere drum heads, to be sounded by the Prime Minister of England—to be made to emit notes, but to have no articulate sounds of their own.”

RICHARD COBDEN, House of Commons, 1845.

In political writings and even more in speeches the word *democracy* is used to convey various meanings. The old Greek significance is sometimes retained, viz., a form of government in which the many—as opposed to the few, or to one—participate. Then we have its use with the implication of a greater or less degree of representation of the people in a chamber with some share in the work of government. Yet again there is its employment to indicate the people as a whole and even the “ masses ” as opposed to the “ classes.” All this leads to confusion both of private thought and public issues. Throughout the following pages the word is used solely and exclusively in the significance which Lincoln gave it—Government of the people by the people for the people. No restriction is implied, and *the people* means *all the people*. In a modern advanced community *all the people* should mean all citizens whose incapacity has not been positively established. Practical considerations lead to the fixing of an age limit, usually and properly coincident with that of the acquisition of the status of a fully responsible legal person, when capacity is presumed.

Democracy thus comes to imply full self-government. As direct participation by *all* is impossible, the political institutions must be based upon Representation—which, incidentally, was not a British invention or discovery. The method by which the individual transfers his share of self-government to a representative is that of the Election. The actual vehicle, as it were, is the Vote. It follows then that every limitation of the Franchise or Voting Power and every defect in the method of Election of necessity occasions a limitation and defect in the Representation. To this must be added that a cumbrous unfair or too-complicated system of Registration—*i.e.*, the practical means whereby the Electors are ascertained and scheduled—also has its share in impairing the Representation. All this is very elementary, but it needs clear statement in view of the false assertions that our system is truly representative. Not being so, we find at the very outset that a prerequisite for democracy is absent.

In the pages which follow I show that even more vital defects exist in our Parliamentary System. Owing to these, so far from possessing democracy, our Government is lodged in the hands of a secret, autocratic Cabinet. This in its turn is based upon a Party System in which the parties have become ever more mechanical—ever less the grouping of free, intelligent and conscientious opinion. The Cabinet is constituted by a selection from one of such parties. It does not represent the opinions of the people. It may not represent even the majority of its own party. To ensure its tenure of office it must have a well-disciplined majority in the House of Commons—the better drilled, the less freedom of judgment, the more

secure is the Cabinet. Of some of the evils which flow from this system and from the methods normal to its operation there is more below.

If at first sight such strictures on our party system, and on the nature of the Government established upon it, appear wild or even exaggerated I would plead for a little introspection on the part of the dissentient reader. Let him if a Unionist, honestly recall his feelings and opinions with regard to the tactics of his opponents in the Elections of (say) 1906 and 1910. If a Liberal he might use the Election of 1903 for his experiment—1918 might be too painful, however instructive. If a Labour man—well any Election will do. A useful general enquiry is afforded by endeavouring to answer honestly such questions as to the manner of and reasons for the conversion of the Liberal Party to Home Rule, and the Unionist Party to Tariff Reform. Or he might search out whether our scandalous failure with regard to Ireland is or is not intimately bound up with considerations of party. And by way of a final test—is he satisfied that appointments to high and important offices are made merely upon an honest concern for the public welfare?

Even after such an examination some will say that all this is true—but we are assured by high authorities that our Constitution is well nigh perfect: that after all it works: that all these defects are due to the inherent wickedness of men—or is it our party opponents? Are perchance those who give us this assurance of perfection at all interested in maintaining the existence of the present system? Does the statement that *it works* prove that it works well, or disprove the feasibility of discovering something which would work much better? And as to the modernised version

of the doctrine of Original Sin, an honest belief in it would stultify every effort for social progress. I have deliberately preferred to appeal to the common everyday experience of the actual working of our system rather than to the verdict of students. There are, scattered through the pages of many writers on constitutional matters, criticisms and doubts and even strictures upon the Party System and the nature of the Government based upon it. There is, of course, the great work of Ostrogorski—"Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties"—the product of years of patient and exhaustive research into the working of extra-parliamentary organisations both in this country and America. His condemnation of the Caucus Party System is severe and wholesale, whether considered from the point of view of the destruction of free and intelligent opinion or from that of the defects it imparts to the resulting Government. But as my main purpose is to set out a scheme for the drastic reform of Parliament I deem it better to elicit the original thought of those interested in politics. If they can be brought to analyse their experiences, to recollect their views of the proceedings of their political opponents, and *to realise* that those opponents entertain a similar low estimate of motive, method and purpose with regard to them, I believe that the conviction that something is radically wrong will be formed. From that conviction, held by those whose interest in politics is to realise their citizenship, to help to build a better social life, will flow the driving force necessary for reform.

I am only too well aware that the drafting even in rough outline of a plan for such Reform is not a one-man job. But someone must make a commence-

ment in order that many, by helpful criticism, by elaboration of detail, by making good omissions and so forth may co-operate to produce a scheme which shall not merely work, but work efficiently. First must come the realisation that our Government is not Representative. Next the desire and set purpose to achieve Democracy.

Of the future of the parties I have not written. We must always have parties and we must always have a measure of organisation. But the development must be along lines to gain the utmost scope for free opinion, for honest conviction. The union should be of those who, on special subjects, even on a single subject, hold similar views and are in agreement upon the principles which should govern the practical means to make those opinions operative. There will thus be grouping and regrouping in relation to the particular questions under discussion, and one of the principal functions, if not the principal one, of political organisation will be to provide the opportunities for a real education in political matters. But with such a grouping and regrouping what becomes of the "effective working majority?" That majority is essential to the Cabinet System of Government, which would disappear under the scheme I advocate. The necessary majority will be secured by the combination of those who conscientiously hold the same or closely similar opinions on the matter under discussion. Opinion would be rendered free to express itself and honest in the expression. But, once more, does not the abolition of the Cabinet System involve or imply Government by a Coalition? Undeniably. Did not Mr. Lloyd George tell us last December that Government must represent every section and every

class? But two things different in themselves are not made the same by classifying them under the same heading. The Coalitions of the past—longer or shorter—were one and all the outcome of secret arrangements and hidden bargainings. The Coalition—if such it must be called—under my scheme is brought into being openly and honestly and has to be accredited by the due and formal acceptance of a really representative House of Commons. Its inception is different, its constitution is different, its functions are different from those of the Coalitions of which we have had experience and which very properly are viewed with suspicion.

But first things first. Such a development is impossible so long as the Cabinet System based on the Caucus remains. And so long as it remains the talk about democracy is not only foolish, it is dangerous.

I.

“ We have no longer a Government by free opinion, no longer a government by conviction and the vote of the majority, but a government by the opinion and the duress of small groups of dominant men.”

PRESIDENT WILSON (*The New Freedom*, p. 158).

Lord Curzon has recently said that the Cabinet System has broken down both for war and for peace. What he has openly declared, more and more people have been thinking. An even greater number, unable to shake off the influence of the constant reiteration of the representative and democratic character of our political institutions and yet feeling that somehow things go badly astray, has had its faith in representative institutions shattered. It is well, therefore, to take every opportunity of emphasizing that we have moved further and further from representative and

democratic government since the Caucus has ruled the parties and enabled the Cabinet to usurp those powers which the House of Commons after long struggles wrested from the Crown. And to-day it is more than ever necessary to direct attention to these facts. The task of the Peace Conference is "to make the world safe for Democracy." We had better set to work to establish a Democracy at home for which to make the world safe. If it is to be truly Reconstruction and not an attempt at restoration of pre-war conditions so far as possible, if we are to build a new world, for in truth the old is shattered past repairing, we must recognise that the task is hopeless unless we have the proper tools. With the restoration of those liberties of the subject with which DORA and her kinsfolk have played havoc, anything remotely resembling the present oligarchy would neither be tolerated nor workable. Equally, to recommend for the acceptance of the people as a whole, those vast changes inseparable from Reconstruction, the old Party Cabinet—but another oligarchy—will not do. For such far-reaching changes, which will affect profoundly the vital interests of all sections of the community, there must be some body really representative of the whole people and functioning in such fashion that its decisions are above all suspicion of sectional bias. The farce which has been played at Westminster must end—the happiness and well-being of the people and not a party triumph must be the one and only object of the work of Parliament. For the furtherance of that object the House of Commons must be radically transformed. It must be made representative, and it must have restored to it the powers and authority which the Cabinet has stolen.

To radically transform Parliament means constitutional change, and a proposal to do so arouses a fierce opposition from those whose interests are served by fostering the illusion that "our great and glorious constitution" has been handed down to us as an unalterable trust from the past. The Constitution say in 1913 was something quite changed from that of 1900, and that of 1900 differed from that of any other period, while its various transformations from 1914 to 1918 are bewildering. There has been a constant process of development—change has been consciously imposed and change has arisen in the course of unconscious growth. Ever it has been modified under the pressure of new conditions, and now it must be adapted to a new world. What it is to-day—or, better, in the immediate pre-war epoch—is largely based on Schnadhurst's and Chamberlain's importation of the Caucus. It is thus, as history goes, quite recent. Of the development of the Caucus party system, of its transformation of party as conceived by Burke, a living natural organisation of opinion, into the artificial mechanism of to-day I cannot now speak. Equally I have to assume as common knowledge—even where it is least admitted—its blighting and corrupting influence on our people, on our policy, on our whole life. The rigid party of to-day is a grouping together of interests whose ends are served by the co-operation—interests which by securing the control of Government, mould policy and administration to further sectional purposes. That lip service is paid to wider principles and that the existence of other parties (*i.e.*, of other interests equally banded together) force a less narrow range of action upon the party in power is true. But it does not do away with

the tendency to view and to treat every subject primarily from a sectional standpoint. We were told to "think Imperially," and we have not yet learned to think Nationally!

Under our constitution it is from such a party that those who run the machine select the Cabinet. This is the fact. The legal theory states matters differently. The Cabinet itself is but a modern creation. It arose as a Committee of the Privy Council. It gained its first real powers when face to face with Sovereigns who did not speak English. At one time it had some representative character. To-day it is an annexe of a party structure. Further, and still directly due to the Caucus system, this misrepresentative secret body has usurped the power and authority of the House of Commons. As it has grown more and more autocratic so the House of Commons has become more and more its creature. The Ministry—the servants of the people—has become master. Again the legal theory is otherwise, but this is the fact in working practice. The doctrine of collective responsibility coupled with the power to dissolve or even to threaten a dissolution hold the House of Commons subservient and largely impotent. Fitfully, revolts arise. But for the most part we have a pitiable docility, an abject cringing as the crack of the party whip is heard. Thus we have no representative Government, we have lost all adequate control over administration, debate is a farce with the foregone conclusion of a mechanical division, and all the well-known features of the game of "Ins and Outs." Well may we breed politicians and not statesmen. Well may we find ourselves in the day of trial the playthings of men whose training has been to exploit prejudice, to stir rancour, to trade

on emotionalism. The utter inadequacy of our methods was recognised in Parliament itself. By tacit consent Foreign policy was lifted out of the arena. Why? War breaks out and a party truce is declared. Again why?—even without comment on the curiosities of its observance! The obvious answer to these questions is a root and branch condemnation of our system of Government.

This is not the place or the occasion to cite chapter and verse. The facts are well known. The evils are felt by each one who has but a spark of feeling for the lot of his fellows. And now the matter has been driven to such lengths that there is a wide-spread distrust of representative institutions. If such distrust go but little further we shall have rendered Democracy impossible. Government of the people by the people for the people cannot be achieved otherwise than by representative institutions. Our sorry delusion has been to believe, to allow ourselves to be persuaded, that the party system and its Cabinet are representative. They are not and never can be made such.

II.

“I am not afraid of the judgments so expressed (by ballot) if you give men time to think, if you give them a clear conception of the things they are to vote for, because the deepest conviction and passion of my heart is that the common people, by which I mean all of us, are to be absolutely trusted.”

PRESIDENT WILSON (*The New Freedom*, p. 88).

But a few days ago I read in a leading article of one of the few independent newspapers we still possess that the great advantage of our party system is that it provides an alternative government. The very obvious most often escapes notice! The existence of

this alternative government is precisely the most mischievous fact in our political system. Upon it the whole game of "Ins and Outs" is founded. Instead of the Members of the House of Commons co-operating, by honest interchange of opinions, to establish the conditions under which happiness and well-being may be ever more widely secured, we have matters regulated by the working maxim that "it is the business of the Opposition to oppose." Criticism—when not stifled by arrangements between the Front Benches—is directed to obstruct and embarrass the Government, to prevent business being done. Every opportunity is sought to catch the Government out by snap divisions—even elaborate schemes may be prepared for hiding the Opposition's supporters so as to mislead the Government Whips. That the notorious "Bathroom Division" was greeted as a smart piece of work instead of a disgraceful scandal is alone evidence of how party politics have degraded our public life. Knowing all the tricks of the game, the Government frames its measures so as to anticipate criticism and if possible render it hurtful to the opposing party's interests. In short the opposition's business is to get the Government out and themselves in, and too great scrupulousness as to means is better avoided.

It should also be noticed that this Alternative Government plea is itself founded on the vicious fiction that the political thought of the country can be divided up between two parties. No intelligent opinion can be so partitioned. It is true that, in a very general sense, one may speak of opinions being progressive or conservative. What is true in this statement is merely that temperamentally the tendency

of an individual's thought can be placed in one of these categories. But under progressive we find all shades from the definitely cautious to the obviously reckless. And under conservative one may range from the timidly experimental to the determinedly reactionary. But again these divisions describe at best general tendencies. A progressive is not always progressive in his views, nor equally progressive on all subjects. Nor is a conservative always and invariably conservative. Everyone has known Conservatives in party adherence who on many points were advanced democrats. Equally there are many adherents of the Liberal party who on some matters are definitely reactionary. So that quite apart from any consideration of the great and growing Labour party the theory of a two-party system is false to the facts. It is a survival from that past in which so many of our public men are still dreaming. Its acceptance, tacit or avowed, by the rank and file is a superstition.

All this could be vastly amplified. Quite a respectable book—respectable as to size—could be written upon the Gentle Art of Evading Questions. Some of the chapter headings might be Innocent Surprise, Veiled Insolence, Calculated Confusion, Hurt Dignity, When a Falsehood is not a Lie. The solemn farce of the set debate, when, according to the enthralled occupants of the Press Gallery, "The Rt. Hon. gentleman gave one of the characteristic and dazzling displays of his mastery of dialectics. His subtle and dexterous argument," etc., etc. Only, in the dispassionate pages of Hansard, one finds that all this refers to a collection of obvious debating points strung together on a line of fallacies! The student

of Hansard is almost driven to conclude that the average intelligence of the House of Commons is extremely low. Not daring to believe this, he finds instead that the methods and motives of the debates bring out all the weakness instead of the strength. Amongst the other ills which the system cherishes are those due to the doctrine of the collective responsibility of the Ministry. Absurd and illogical, it is yet necessary to the party Government we enjoy. By it a weak and incompetent Minister is shielded and the control of Parliament over Administration is reduced to the meagrest dimensions. There is also the converse to this, viz., where an honest and capable administrator is sacrificed to the exigencies of some party crisis.

And so the tale runs on. If even a portion of the above be true it may well be asked "How is any government of the people carried on at all?" The answer is that behind all the party game there is the machinery of the Civil Service with its permanent heads of Departments. These are singularly efficient for *routine* work. That they are not efficient in the degree demanded for proper administration under modern conditions is amply proved by the very drastic recommendations of the Machinery of Government Committee (Cd. 9230) not to mention the special investigations into the working of the Civil Service generally.

When the real nature of the proceedings in Parliament is understood less surprise is felt at the methods prevalent at a General Election and the processes by which party programmes are formulated. A great leader speaking recently of one of these party conventions praised the "full and free discussion" which

then took place. He is an honest man, and his excuse must be that he was not present. For undeniably his description reminds one of that of a crab as "a red fish which walks backwards." This was submitted to Buffon, the eminent naturalist, who remarked "Yes! that's all right but—" "But what?" asked the proud authors. "O! nothing much, but—a crab isn't red, it isn't a fish, and it doesn't walk backwards." And so I may say—The proceedings in question were not full, were not free, and were as much a discussion as a crab is a fish. If this be doubted let anyone make enquiry of the time allotted for the moving and seconding of amendments, and of how many of those present had seen the agenda paper before entering the place of assembly.

The usual methods of a General Election reached their high-water level in the one which has just been held. This, whether we consider the general motives, the selection of the occasion, or the nature of the appeals addressed to the electorate. One new feature was introduced, viz., the organised effort from the centre to destroy the freedom of local choice. It is instructive to note that this trick could not have been played had not the official element of the Liberal party aided and abetted the rejection of Proportional Representation. It was only by taking advantage of the most glaring defect of our Electoral system—the Single Member constituency—that any such plan could have been successful. With multi-membered constituencies it would have been as foolish as ineffective. But it is no part of my purpose to enter into the details of this particular General Election. What I desire to bring out is the ordinary recognised procedure. In this we have secrecy instead of publicity—

intrigue instead of the honest exchange of opinion—ambiguity instead of clearness—personalities (better if scandalous) instead of policies—and all the trickeries of quack advertisements instead of definite statements of real facts. Throughout appeal is made to the lower, more easily evoked emotions, and this to such an extent that any higher appeal takes on the semblance of cant or hypocrisy. There is the definite evasion of real issues as each party is far too busy denouncing and falsifying the policy of the others. Lavish promises quite beyond any reasonable chance of fulfilment are scattered broadcast. Like the spurious patriotism which is fostered by hatred or contempt of the foreigner instead of by love of one's fellow countrymen, party allegiance is secured by inculcating fear and dislike of the other parties. Baldly stated as in the foregoing summary there is admittedly an exaggeration. But all these tendencies and all these methods *are* employed, and that very generally though not exclusively. At all events there is no exaggeration in saying that demagoguery has largely displaced statesmanship.

All these—the futilities of the House of Commons and the tricks and stratagems and ruses of electioneering—are factors of disillusion and distrust. And as the people so deceived are continually told that they are in possession of representative institutions, that theirs is a democracy, that they are the Sovereign people, their distrust is directed in ever increasing volume upon representative institutions generally. Let their distrust but grow sufficiently and we shall have anarchy—not the philosophic but the Bolshevik variety. The day of sops and palliatives has gone by. Nothing short of drastic measures will answer. It must be

Reconstruction—genuine, far-reaching. Rebuilding on the old plans will not do even if some modern additions and improvements be made.

The methods of our practical politics are to-day what they were in the main 50 years ago, only developed by an intensive culture. Already at that time they were antiquated in view of the changes wrought in the social structure and in the people themselves. What our party politicians overlook is the growing social self-consciousness. The evils of poverty—the warping and cramping of human life—were always evils and known as such. To-day they are also known to ever-growing numbers as Social Injustice. It is realised as never before that they have their root and origin in the mal-adjustments of social institutions to the needs and requirements of a more complete self-realisation. They function badly. All of them — religious, political, educational, economic, legal, social—have been closely scrutinised and are being severely questioned. All of them have been found wanting.

The position is not rendered more easy by the fact that attention has been largely concentrated upon economic conditions, and as a consequence the claim is made for the reconstruction of the industrial system on an entirely new basis. Also this explains why the form of the immediate demands is for more money and shorter hours of labour. Unfortunately the form is ever taken by the politician, as contrasted with the statesman, instead of the substance. And the substance of the demand is for the conditions of something which can be rightly called a human existence. For my present purpose it is sufficient to notice these facts and to point out that this movement of discontent

summed up in the term "labour unrest" reinforces the distrust which the working of our political machinery directly engenders.

In this combination lies the gravest danger. Hopeless of effecting the necessary changes by Parliamentary process, the urge is towards direct, *i.e.*, extra-Parliamentary, action. Without enlarging upon the gravity of the danger, and without indicating its possible forms, let us recognise that it in turn is increased by two sets of experience. First is the fact that every advance in the remuneration of Labour and in the improvement of its conditions has been won by fighting. Secondly, we have had the working of the system of private profit exposed in all its worst features and as it were tremendously magnified by the War. Though it be convenient for politicians for their own ends to ignore the fact, more and more of the people *know* the part which big commercial, industrial and financial interests play in maintaining world conditions favourable to War. All this strengthens and emphasizes the pressing need to make Reconstruction real, and as an integral part of it, to provide the machinery which shall give the people—all the people, not this or that section, however large—a real control of the policy and the administration of government. We must have the instruments for a real democracy. Government of the people by Mr. Lloyd George for the Unionist party may effect much that is good. Even if all were good it would not be democracy. I do not urge this in any spirit of pedantic interpretation of the word "democracy." I am looking at the basic elements in social development. National self-determination—of which we are hearing so much, and however the diplomat or

politician may interpret it—is after all the corporate demand for the general conditions under which individuals may live or believe they can live with the greatest chance of happiness. It is a demand to be put and left in the position to work out their own salvation in their own way. And on the political side this involves ultimately self-government or democracy. On the ethical side it involves the acquisition by the practice of self-government of individual self-control.

Never for a moment must we lose sight of the fact that every political action has its moral aspect and bearing. Institutions and practices which hinder or warp the progressive moralisation of life are a standing menace not merely to the established order we know but to the development of a Society which shall be the embodiment of Justice. The *establishment* of such a Society is admittedly an ideal. But the conscious direction of social evolution towards its realisation should be the constant purpose of all political thought and action.

III.

“I want the people to come in and take possession of their own premises, for I hold that the Government belongs to the people, and that they have a right to that intimate access to it which will determine every turn of its policy.”

PRESIDENT WILSON (*New Freedom*, p. 63).

If in truth our object is Reconstruction and our goal is Democracy, we must transform our Parliament. It is a big question and as vital as it is big. And yet it involves merely the making effective in practice of what has been in the main the theory of our Constitution, and what certainly has been the

declared intention of many party leaders. If we can mould our Parliamentary institutions so that they shall operate to give self-government the problems of Reconstruction can be faced with hope. The solutions, or attempts at solutions, will then be really of the Nation's own devising with the best advice and direction which can be secured. Failing this, such attempts will one and all lie under the suspicion of emanating from an unrepresentative source and embodying more or less of sectional favouritism according as this or that interest or combination of interests secures a political "pull."

Stress has been laid upon the fact that self-government is not secured by the machinery which we possess. The actual operation of our Party System has had, as we have seen, a like effect. These points can be emphasized without in any way losing sight of the truth contained in the common statement "Machinery is not everything." I must readily admit that you might supply perfect machinery, but if the knowledge, skill, desire and opportunity to work it properly be absent, good results will not be achieved. "A bad workman blames his tools" is also a truth drawn from common experience, but it is not so generally recognised that you cannot train good workmen with bad tools.

One of the very greatest evils—if not actually the greatest—which is directly due to our defective political machinery is the bad political training of our people. Lord Bryce has indicated that the main hindrances to good citizenship are Indolence, Private Self-interest and the Party Spirit. He has not sufficiently brought out that each of these, and particularly the first and last, are encouraged and fostered by our

faulty system. The phrase "Politics is a dirty game" is far too frequently heard to allow it to be regarded as entirely without justification. The prevalent sneer directed at anyone who appeals to principles, implied by dubbing him "doctrinaire" or "idealist" indicates the weight that is given to sheer opportunism. Indeed the word "politician" is coming to have a definitely evil connotation. These are but a few of the many illustrations which could be cited of the very widespread opinion that there is something crooked, something wrong, in politics. But apart from such a view no one familiar with the tactics of party warfare can place them on a high level. That they involve great organising ability, great ingenuity in working up and presenting a case, great skill in picking out weak points in the enemy's positions and so forth, is undeniable. But no one will look to them for clear, precise and honest statements of an issue. Such education as is afforded an electorate by the prevalent methods at a General Election is thoroughly bad. I dealt with some of these methods in the preceding section. Here I want to emphasize that the working of the whole system in and out of Parliament is a training in sectionalism and prejudice. It rests upon and calls out some of the worst anti-social impulses, and it moves in an atmosphere of sensationalism. For every year that it continues we are rendering more difficult the growth of a really democratic spirit, as we are encouraging a low view of citizenship.

The question then of machinery is important. It cannot be dismissed with a contemptuous shrug and some depreciatory reference to "constitution-mongering." It has been pretty generally recognised that

certain great vested interests are inimical to the common well-being. It has not yet been sufficiently recognised that there are vested interests in the party and governmental machinery itself which obstinately oppose reform. In every institution the same phenomenon is observed. Gradually there grow up in and about it larger or smaller groups of individuals who are more interested—whatever be the impelling motive—in maintaining the institution than in the social needs it was intended to satisfy. In political matters we have illustrations of this in the opposition to each Reform measure. Much of the opposition to Woman Suffrage was due to the same cause. The most recent and striking example is afforded by a study of the character and methods of the opposition to Proportional Representation. We have therefore to guard against the probability of misleading criticism of any proposed change which is directed from interested quarters. Not to reject it outright—but to weigh and consider it. For it may well be that while some change is necessary the particular alterations advocated carry an equally interested bias.

It is in connection with the formation of correct judgments upon such matters that clearness of statement and the honest disclosure of purpose are so important. Equally necessary are the enunciation of definite principles and the exact indication of the method of their application in any given case. From beginning to end there must be the utmost publicity. Intrigue, chicane, illicit bargains are hatched in secrecy. Without a radical transformation of our political machinery and methods such publicity cannot be attained. But, if we can establish the proper machinery—if in its working it makes it advantageous

to concentrate upon policy, to enunciate and prove the bearing of any course advocated upon the general well-being, to associate the people at every stage with the formation of the programme, to encourage open and public discussion and to ensure a real popular control over the carrying out of the policy—we shall give the opportunity for developing the spirit of true self-government. The task is no easy one, but it is not impossible. Indeed it will have to be undertaken and that without delay if we are to save such Representation as we do possess. To the end that thought may be directed to this fundamental reform, I subjoin in rough outline a scheme with a minimum of comment. But first I set out the objects intended to be achieved in the following summary.

1. To ensure as complete and exact a Representation as possible.
2. To make Registration a National concern and to enhance the value of electoral rights by making a personal claim on the part of the elector obligatory.
3. To ensure the decency of elections, the concentration upon real issues and the abolition of the methods for creating "contagious hysteria" now prevalent and encouraged.
4. To make the House of Commons a really representative chamber.
5. To ensure a proper direction and control of the bureaucracy.
6. To secure the proper co-ordination of the Government Departments.

7. To make Ministers individually responsible to the House of Commons.
8. To ensure that the debates shall be genuinely and continuously directed towards national ends as opposed to party advantage.
9. To provide in a Second Chamber an opportunity for review and consultation upon all matters of national interest.

The scheme which I put forward to attain these objects naturally falls into three sections, viz :—

- I. Franchise—Registration—Election.
- II. The House of Commons.
- III. The Second Chamber.

It might be thought that after the recent Representation of the People Act, 1918, the subject of Franchise, Registration and Election should rest awhile. This is impossible. That Act is characterised by the victory of anti-democratic forces—in spite of the advance its provisions effect. It has granted as small an extension of electoral rights as could safely be done, although in comparison with the conditions prior to its enactment the advance appears enormous. To judge it aright one has to follow the course of the debates in detail and to supplement the knowledge so acquired by an acquaintance with the collusions, intrigues, and arrangements made otherwise than on the floor of the House. I cannot go into this on the present occasion. It must suffice to ask the reader to consider whether the objects under heads 1, 2 and 3

above are vital to democracy, and, if so, whether our system provides for them?

Upon the two subsequent sub-divisions of my scheme I only wish to make a very general remark. If a House of Commons can be secured to function in such fashion as to give real self-government I would be satisfied with a Single Chamber. But we must recognise the practical problems involved and provide for the transition period, *i.e.*, the period during which the reformed House and the people are each learning the lessons of a new experience. For this period I consider that the balance of advantage lies with a Bicameral System, even without taking into account certain direct gains from the consideration of National and Imperial problems from as many different points of view as are practicable.

I turn then to the Scheme itself with, as I previously remarked, a minimum of comment.

I. FRANCHISE—REGISTRATION— ELECTION.

1. Universal adult suffrage on a short residential qualification.

Note.—Every limitation of the Franchise is a limitation of self-government. No limitation should be tolerated unless for an established incapacity. The impulse to the performance of duties is strengthened by the knowledge of trust and responsibility.

2. Total abolition of plural voting.

Note.—Something of a case might be made for its retention in Municipal Elections. The local questions may be entirely different—indeed are

so—where an individual's constituency of residence is other than that of his business. But for Parliament the dominating consideration must be national. In this aspect each individual is definitely a unit and no more.

3. A personal claim to be made for Registration upon forms provided free of charge.

Note.—I prefer this method to any system of compulsory voting. It will make the vote more desirable and emphasize its social value. As education in citizenship progresses so will such a regulation lose any restrictive element. A vote *is* worth being asked for if *all* must do so.

4. Registration to be continuous and carried out by National officials.

Note.—The Register should always be up to date within the narrowest possible working limits. This is a mere “business” proposition, but we have to insure against a dissolution at any time finding an imperfect Register.

5. Certificates of removal to be granted so as to ensure continuity of Registration.

Note.—The principles should be “once a voter always a voter” unless struck off under proper conditions.

6. Elections to be conducted by Proportional Representation with the Single Transferable Vote in constituencies returning not less than five members.

Note.—Some form of Proportional Representation is absolutely essential to secure fair

representation, and the Single Transferable Vote system is the simplest and most direct. The Alternative Vote is only a form of the Second Ballot, and the opinion in every country which has had experience of the Second Ballot is unfavourable to it. Sligo can work P.R., but according to many "interested" politicians an English, Scotch or Welsh electorate has not sufficient intelligence!

7. Various measures to make an election a true trial of real political issues.

Note.—Examples might be multiplied, but it will suffice to suggest drastic limitation of bill-posting and kindred advertisements and prohibition of vehicles. The object aimed at is to prevent the corruption of an electorate by the "power of the purse" and limit the opportunities for working up "contagious hysteria." The reform under 6 will very materially contribute to the attainment of this object, for it will make continuous educational propaganda necessary quite apart from its own inherent value in affording a wider choice to the elector and a real value to his vote.

With the people's representatives chosen and elected under the conditions which the above reforms would establish, the House of Commons, given a proper constitution and procedure, will become an efficient instrument of self-government. I pass then to set out the Scheme for such a constitution for the House of Commons.

II. THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

1. **To be elected for a fixed period, say three years. An earlier dissolution may take place upon a specific resolution after due notice and passed by a certain majority.**

Note.—This provision is required to destroy the autocratic powers of the Cabinet. It does away with the duress which even a threat of dissolution exercises. It makes all the manœuvres to snatch a party advantage by snap divisions and so on useless. It restores to the House its independence and authority. It can then recover its prestige.

2. **A Committee of Members representative of all parties in the House to be set up for each of the Departments of State.**

Note.—The need for such Committees has long been recognised. They have been proposed for Foreign Relations and Finance. The Montagu Report suggests one for Indian Affairs. Probably nomination by the Speaker would answer as a mode of selection coupled with the right to nominate by say 40 or 50 members. In the necessary circumstances election to take place by the House voting by P.R. The main purposes to be served by such Departmental Committees would be (a) To exercise an efficient control over the bureaucracy; (b) To act as advisory and consultative bodies to the Minister for the Department; (c) To keep the House of Commons continuously informed as to administrative matters and methods and to train up a body of instructed opinion.

The number of members on each Committee would vary with the nature and amount of the particular Department's work. It should be large enough to allow of small sub-committees being set up to deal with special portions or detailed investigations.

Each Committee would elect its own Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and the Minister for the Department and his deputy should be *ex officio* members of the Committee.

3. The Prime Minister to be elected by the House of Commons upon the nomination of not less than (say) 100 Members.

Note.—His primary functions would fall under the general direction of policy, the arrangement and control of the business of the House, and the co-ordination of the work of the Departments. The qualities required for these duties are quite other than those which carry a man to the leadership of one of our present parties. Such a man may possess them, but even if he do he cannot exercise them properly as he is first and foremost the head of a party. What are imperatively needed are the qualities which would make a man a good Managing-Director of some great enterprise—for under this Scheme he has to manage our National and Imperial affairs.

In the performance of his duties he would be aided by a Council of Ministers [v. 5 (b) below] and a Grand Council [v. 5 (a) below].

4. (a) The Ministers—the Heads of the Departments, including the Secretaries of State—to

be Members of the House of Commons, to be nominated by the Prime Minister and to be confirmed or, when necessary, elected by the House. Provision for (say) 50 Members to nominate a Minister.

- (b) Each Minister shall be individually responsible to the House of Commons, and may be removed by resolution after due notice and passed by a certain majority.

Note.—Ministerial office should not be the the reward of party service, and even more, it should not follow upon intrigue and backstairs influence. The appointment must be open and above board and of a man who is reasonably believed to possess the requisite qualifications. He should be primarily an Administrator. The less skill he has in defending the indefensible the better. His work as testified by the efficiency of his Department and not his speeches should form his public recommendation.

5. (a) A Grand Council consisting of all the Ministers and the Chairmen of the Departmental Committees under the presidency of the Prime Minister, shall meet once at least in each session to deliberate upon questions of general policy, the general business of the House and the distribution and co-ordination of Departmental work.

- (b) A Ministerial Council (the New Cabinet) consisting of all the Ministers under the presidency of the Prime Minister, shall meet at

fixed regular intervals and oftener upon special summons, to assist and advise and collaborate with the Prime Minister upon details of policy, legislation, administration, and so forth. No Minutes of the proceedings to be taken but decisions to be recorded in the form of resolutions. The resolutions to be communicated to the Chairmen of the Departmental Committees and the record to be open to the inspection of Ministers. The resolutions not to be published unless with the prior consent of the Prime Minister, or upon express resolution of the House of Commons calling for the production of the resolutions pertinent to any particular matter.

Note.—Without an elaboration far greater than is suitable to the present occasion the full scope of these provisions cannot be covered. The object to be aimed at is sufficiently shown by the outline above. (1) Sufficient opportunity for deliberation and consultation between Ministers; (2) The association of the House of Commons with such proceedings by the inclusion of the Chairmen of Departmental Committees; (3) Sufficient guard against interference—interested or impertinent—from outside sources but with a definite and sufficiently direct control by the House. Until the urgent and necessary rearrangements of the work of the various Departments has been effected the details under this head 5 cannot usefully be discussed. This would take us too far afield.

6. Legislation to be introduced by resolutions setting out in general terms the Object, Scope and Method of the proposed measure. Upon the passing of such Resolutions a Bill to be prepared by the Department primarily concerned in consultation where necessary with other Departments. The Bill to be considered and reported to the House by an Inter-Departmental Sub-Committee. Amendments to be tabled and referred to and considered by the Sub-Committee and the Bill again reported to the House. The Bill to be then—whether amended or not—to be sent for review to the Second Chamber or by specific resolution referred again to the Sub-Committee. Upon return from the Second Chamber the House may pass the Bill—accepting or rejecting the Amendments, or send it back to the Second Chamber.

Note.—The final word must rest with the House of Commons. But we have to avoid so far as possible the absurdity of the House “drafting” Bills and all the evils of multiplied litigation consequent upon this process. As under this Scheme no purpose could be served by obstructionist debate, unless an easily-detected bid for notoriety, measures would be adequately and honestly discussed without any need of guillotine machinery, and the general good would become the guiding motive. Once more it is impossible to give the detailed rules and provisions. My object is to sketch an outline sufficient to display the general purpose and the requisite main structure. *E.g.*, a useful

provision would give power to the House of Commons (where such course was deemed advisable) to send up the Resolutions and request the Second Chamber to devise the necessary legislation to give effect to them—the final decision of course remaining with the House of Commons.

Some such Scheme is absolutely essential if we desire to secure Representative Government. I need not dwell again upon the anomalous position in a supposedly democratic constitution of a secret autocratic cabinet—developing into a more secret, more autocratic, inner ring or junta. Much as I deprecate Mr. Lloyd George's methods, yet I seem to recognise in his plea for a Coalition a desire to secure some degree of representative character for a Ministry. Without examining the gross and inherent defects of his procedure, let me continue my outline sketch by setting out the Scheme for a Second Chamber. I premise it by stating quite bluntly that the proposals of the Bryce Report are utterly unacceptable. They constitute one of the finest examples of that spirit of compromise which does not distinguish between the rightful choice of ways and means and a betrayal of principles. One point, the method of election to the Second Chamber, is common to the Bryce Report and my Scheme.

III. THE SECOND CHAMBER.

- I. To be elected by Members of the House of Commons voting by P.R. in geographical groups, each group to return not less than 15 Members.

Note.—It would appear that the geographical groups recommended by the Bryce Report

could be usefully reduced to say a North-Eastern, North-Western, Midland, Eastern, and Southern, and Scotland and Wales, *i.e.*, seven groups instead of thirteen.

2. All British subjects to be eligible for membership of the Second Chamber.

Note.—Provisions could usefully be made for the membership of representatives elected by the Representative Houses of the self-governing Dominions and the bodies most nearly approaching such in India and the Overseas possessions. This is not intended to prejudice any scheme for an Imperial Council. It is to provide an opportunity for hearing the expression of opinions from the Dominions and Overseas Possessions, on the many matters in which Parliamentary action affects these countries, often indirectly, but nevertheless quite definitely. In any event the provision should be permissive not obligatory. Some use could be made of such representation with regard to Ireland in connection with Irish Autonomy.

3. Membership to be for nine years, one third to retire every three years.

Note.—The Bryce Report recommends twelve years and a third to retire every four years. I suggest that nine years is long enough, but it is not an important point. The first third to retire might be those who were lowest on the First Counts, the second third those who were next lowest. Thereafter the third who had been members for the longest time since their last election.

4. **The Second Chamber to have no veto. It shall have power to review all Bills, including Money Bills, and to recommend amendments to the House of Commons within a fixed time-limit.**

Note.—The time-limit would be determined by resolution of the House of Commons and might be extended with the consent of that House. A very useful provision would be the setting up of a special drafting Committee before which the Bill would come before final enactment. In this way ambiguities and inconsistencies which constitute a veritable scandal would be avoided and generally measures could be put into language and form of a much more comprehensible character than at present. The same remarks apply to Orders and Rules. The spectacle of two eminent Counsel admitting on the floor of the House that they could not construe a particular Order was not edifying.

5. **The Second Chamber to have a power of initiating legislation—other than Money Bills—and of conducting investigations by Commissions and Special Committees, especially upon matters specifically referred to them by the House of Commons.**

Note.—With a Second Chamber somewhat upon these lines every possibility of disputes with the House of Commons disappears. The full authority of the People's Representatives is assured. There is ample opportunity for review and the Second Chamber has no motive for competition with the First, but will build

up prestige and popular confidence in proportion as it uses its opportunities in the interests of the Nation as a whole. At the same time, a valuable consultative method will be set up and the work of the House of Commons both facilitated and broadened. The question of the Officers and Official arrangements of the Second Chamber it is unnecessary to enter into at present. It will suffice to state that the work would be performed most efficiently by means of Committees and Sub-Committees. Provision must of course be made to communicate details of Policy as decided by the Ministerial Council, for opportunities for Ministers to address the Chamber, for the supply of all requisite information from Departments, and generally to place the Chamber in a position to carry out its duties and to prevent overlapping between it and the House of Commons.

The Scheme as above outlined certainly contemplates a reform which is a radical transformation of the existing system. Nevertheless, many of the ancient forms of ceremonial rather than of practical value and interest can be retained. Its break is not so much with the past as with the developments of the last half century. But in criticising it I would plead for an attitude of mind different to that implied by the statement in the Bryce Report about our "Ancient and famous Constitution which has for more than seven centuries safeguarded the liberties and advanced the greatness of the British People." If this means anything at all it can only be that our Constitution of to-day is the same as that of the 13th

century. It is one of the rhetorical flourishes which unfortunately pass current to the confusion of political thought. In itself it is of little importance, but it is linked with the whole method of obscurantism which has always opposed each and every radical reform by appeals to "ancient and venerable traditions." Few men know better than the really learned scholar and experienced man of affairs who makes himself responsible for the above statement that our Constitution is largely "the Accident of a Series of Accidents."

In any case to institute such reforms is a far simpler task than that contemplated by the Montagu Report on Indian Self-Government. Opposition to their introduction will of course be most violent from the bodies and individuals who have vested interests in the existing system.

To establish such a Parliament would undeniably put an end to the "game of politics," but it would very shortly remove the reproach which to-day attaches to the name of politician. With such a change many of those whose services are now but little available in furtherance of the common weal would find their opportunity and their incentive for public work. But above all and before all we should have vindicated our right to call ourselves democratic. Politics and policy would move to an ever higher level as the people realised that at long length they did in fact possess self-government. So we should contribute our share towards "the reign of law based upon the consent of the governed and sustained by the organised opinion of mankind."

IV.

“ I believe there is no permanent greatness to a nation except it be based upon morality. I do not care for military greatness or military renown. I care for the condition of the people among whom I live. Palaces, baronial castles, great halls, stately mansions, do not make a nation. The nation in every country dwells in the cottage; and unless the light of your Constitution can shine there, unless the beauty of your legislation and the excellence of your statesmanship are impressed there on the feelings and condition of the people, rely upon it, you have yet to learn the duties of government.”

JOHN BRIGHT, at Birmingham, 1858.

In the earlier sections I dealt with the growing distrust of representative institutions and indicated its main cause—disillusion and disappointment in the working of our existing political system, coupled with the belief that it was representative. I indicated that the Cabinet Government of to-day was the result of the operation of the mechanical parties which had been constructed on the Caucus plan. Whatever one may term the Government through and by such machinery it is certainly not *representative* in any proper meaning of the term. Nevertheless it is essential to the maintenance of this Party Government to foster the belief that it is and that it does therefore assure self-government. The continual reiteration of this falsity has led to its acceptance by the majority of people as a truth. Hence the distrust and suspicion of representative institutions generally.

This in itself is sufficient to make the need for very drastic reform of our political machinery urgent. The fact that a vast Reconstruction has been promised, that hopes of the establishment of a new social order have been definitely raised and encouraged by recent political programmes, has made the need imperative. And to anyone who can dimly appreciate the causes

operative in the weltering confusion from the Rhine to the Urals, the seething unrest outside these boundaries, the postponement of the reform is not merely foolish, it is fraught with immeasurable dangers.

How far our own leaders of public opinion appreciate the point I do not know. To judge from some of their actions I am inclined to think they have once again only been able to apply traditional and conventional standards of judgment. It is quite obvious that only the force of events and the popular backing in all countries of President Wilson's policy have *driven* them to a new standpoint in international affairs. But assuredly in domestic affairs they have not, as yet, understood the changes which the War has wrought. This is proved beyond question by the manner in which Reconstruction has been introduced into the Party programmes. It has been represented as a series of changes rendered necessary by the War. This is wrong and immediately sets the matter in a wrong light. The War, or rather the termination of the War has brought its own special problems. These turn upon the change-over from a War footing to a Peace footing. The necessity for such a transition has complicated all the problems included in Reconstruction, but it has not created them. All of them were pre-War problems—which the War has intensified and rendered more prominent. Also the experiences of our people during the War have materially altered the outlook and temper with which the problems are regarded. To take them up in the true party fashion by obscuring the issues involved, by attributing them to a false origin and by confusing them with the special War problems is, under the existing world conditions, a most reckless proceeding.

All the problems grouped under Reconstruction—land, housing, temperance, fiscal reform, transport, relations of Capital and Labour, and so forth—were problems clamouring for solution long before the War. Social reformers for generations have been insisting upon their importance and have been urging more or less adequate measures for their solution. All of them are due to the disordered functioning of Society—the mal-adjustments of Social institutions. Each of them is the root of Social Injustice. It is as such a modern Statesman would and must regard them. He would recognise that the time for palliatives has gone by. He would know that the conduct which may arise from the knowledge and feeling of social injustice, added to the positive evils the conditions produce, may culminate in action on the part of the sufferers that is subversive of the whole Social order. We must not forget the vital experiments in new State formations which are in process to-day. Nor the connection of these efforts with theories which have been widely disseminated and fervently preached. It is not only in University Philosophical Societies that the Authoritarian State is being challenged. Even if the philosophical doctrines are not understood the workers eagerly greet visions of life-conditions vastly changed from those they endure. They may take up phrases—The Class War; Down with Capitalism; the Industry for the Workers—all the cant phrases, the shibboleths which cluster about a popular movement. But the Statesman, if he be worthy of the name, will penetrate deeper, will get behind the shouting. He will find that the struggle which is taking so many forms, which is throwing out so many weird and menacing demands, is nevertheless one and indivisible. It is *Property versus Life*.

If he has got so far he will probably very easily travel farther and recognise that if he wants to save his Society from disruption, if he wants to see an orderly evolution, he must rapidly mould his institutions so as to restore confidence in orderly methods. It is a task for Statesmanship, not for the wiles and artifices of the demagogue. The first requisite is that the machinery shall definitely and obviously provide for an impartial hearing of all claims and the easy ventilation and discussion of all grievances. In the next place it must ensure that the men who hold office, who have the arrangement of the business and the carrying out of the policy, shall be chosen with a single eye to the proper performance of their public duty, and that if—as may well happen even upon an honest choice—they prove incompetent or otherwise unsuitable they can be removed and a new choice made. The third condition to be fulfilled is that the action to be taken upon any discussion shall not be subject to check or delay or modification under interested pressure. It must follow the discussion swiftly and certainly. And the fourth essential condition is that there shall be an intimate relation between the “governors” and the “governed”—a relation which shall keep the human element constantly in view.

For many of our public men statistical tables have taken the place of human beings. If the discussion be *e.g.*, as to whether for a particular trade twenty-five shillings or thirty shillings is an adequate minimum, the discussion under the existing conditions turns upon the tabulated figures of the trade. Leaving aside the pressure of the interests involved, usually nicely proportioned to the votes they can command, this is the wrong starting point. What should be determined is the human question of what under all

the circumstances is the minimum which will give the opportunity for a reasonably decent life. When that has been determined the trade statistics can come in. If it be then shown that such a minimum cannot be secured the conclusion is that there is something amiss with the trade. It is obviously parasitic in the condition on which it is then and there being carried on.

Some such Scheme as I have outlined in the preceding section would, I believe, satisfy the conditions I have just sketched and would at least go very far to allay the distrust of our Parliamentary system. No method can be found of making a Cabinet based upon the Caucus fulfil these conditions. Of course, it may now be too late for any such Scheme to be effective. I do not, however, think so, for the most remarkable fact about our people has been their patient endurance of manifold Social Injustice. On the other hand, that patience has become severely strained, and various special experiences of the past five years have definitely made extra-parliamentary action more likely. I refrain from citing specific instances as I wish to avoid giving opportunity for side-tracking the main contention. But everyone who has followed public events at all intelligently will be able to supply the illustrations.

Another disturbing factor is that our party politicians seem quite incapable of recognising the vast change that has come over the electorate in *e.g.*, the last twenty-five years. The change is fairly adequately summed up by describing it as due to an increasing self-consciousness. Among the data of the people's experience is now an extensive knowledge of the life of all classes. The knowledge is often inaccurate, often prejudiced, often superficial. But it is there

and affords the opportunity for a vivid contrast between the lot of the masses and that of those more favourably circumstanced. And besides such general comparisons there are particular instances of really detailed and accurate information. One important example is found in the extensive acquaintance of the workers with the published balance-sheets of the firms engaged in a trade. Individual workers may not be any more capable of reading a balance-sheet properly than some shareholders. But their Trade Union officials can do so, and their papers give summarised reports which bring out the salient question of profits. In this misunderstanding of the people at large we have another cause of the "unreality" of our political life. Our party system operates to create "thinking in battalions" with one end in view, the casting of votes.

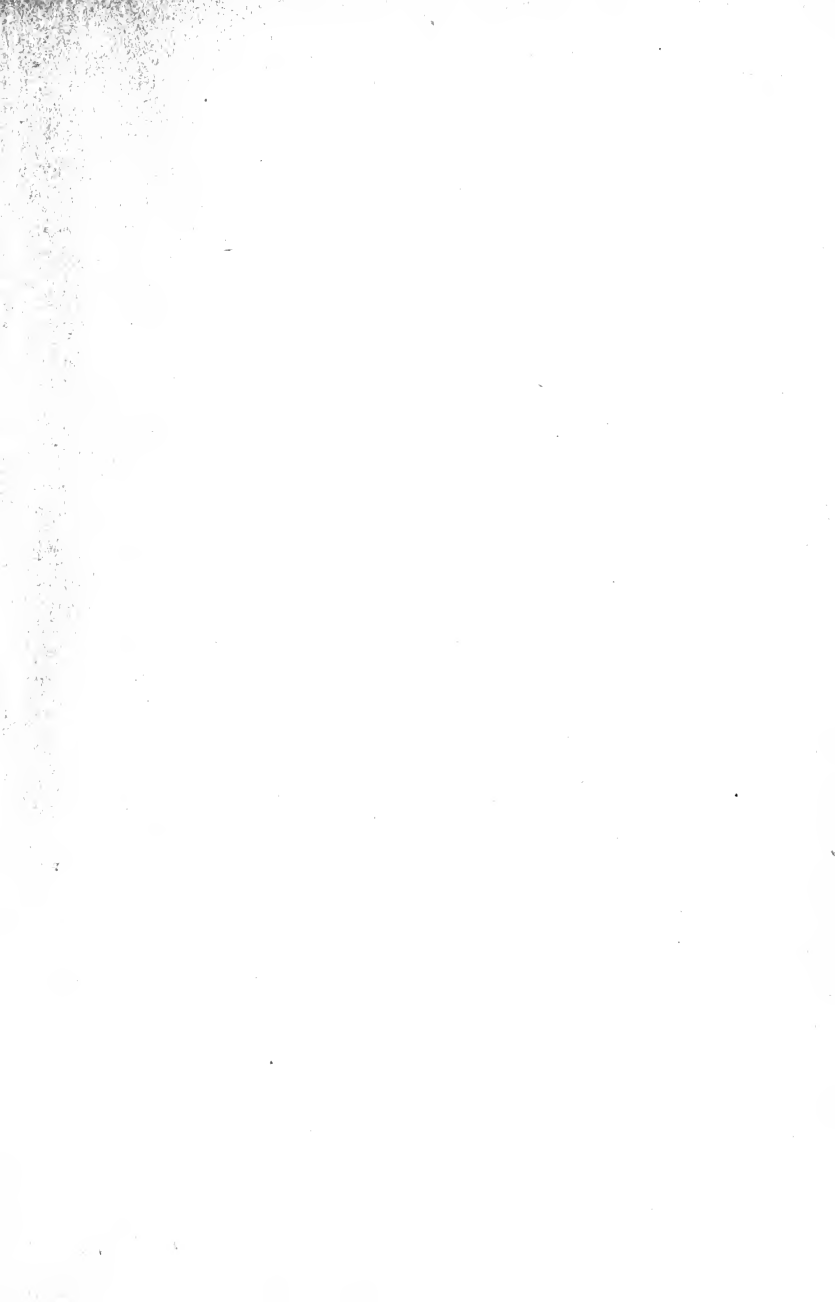
If Reconstruction be attempted without a reform of political machinery and methods it cannot possibly effect the removal of the real sources of Social Injustice. The task will be commenced under a heavy handicap of suspicion. But indeed so much of the plans as have been divulged clearly indicate that Reconstruction is a misnomer. That it is a deliberate misnomer does not improve the position—particularly as the reason for the deliberateness of the choice is clearly apparent. To call it Reconstruction only partially misleads the people, for the plans for increased production, and the plots for enhanced profits, are quite clear, while the schemes for the participation of the workers in a fairer distribution are still in the land of promises. With the distrust which I have been emphasizing there is no expectation that these promises will be fulfilled. That "sops" will be given

in the cases where either the workers have sufficient "pull" or party exigencies make it desirable is anticipated. But this rather increases the distrust and encourages independent sectional action. If, on the other hand, we could set up the political machinery which would render certain the consideration of all questions from the point of view of the common well-being, and would ensure that the measures decided upon were carried through without fear and without favour, there would be the opportunity of a real Reconstruction. That it would not satisfy some of the adherents of extreme theories of the State is certain. That it would evoke wild clamour from a whole range of vested interests is equally certain. But personally I do believe that the situation is as yet not so far out-of-hand but that the bulk of our people would gladly and eagerly respond to clear evidence that they were given a real opportunity of determining the conditions under which they have to labour and to live.

Hitherto such opportunity has been denied them. "A secret Empire," in the words of President Wilson, "has been set up over the forms of democracy." We have seen the nature of this secret Empire, whence it derives its power, and how it maintains its rule. For the results one has but to look round upon the sullen discontent, deep-rooted suspicion, and recklessness born of hopes flouted and broken. Rhetorical flourishes about "great and glorious traditions," "a far-flung Empire," "the most perfect Constitution which only the political genius of the British people, etc., etc."—such flourishes may tickle the ears and flatter the vanity of those who have leisure for play but apparently none for thought. But, if some of

those in high places would step down and learn how such phrases are received by audiences of typical workers they would gather some fruitful knowledge.

Life, with all its real problems, is the hard school in which the worker is educated. His University is the Labour Market. If he fail in its tests there is no degree *in misericordia*—nay, even with a *proxime accessit* he is ploughed and done for. Another gets the job. He is willing enough to work but he demands a free man's right to have his say as to the terms and conditions of his service. He is coming to realise ever more clearly that work is Social service or else it is waste of effort. Vaguely, perhaps, but yet he knows what "dignity of labour" means. "We want work and not charity" was, and is, a favourite motto. It will be well for those who think, that with the payment of the market price for work all obligation to the worker ceases, to ponder upon these views. They may be led to interpret Reconstruction anew. They may even come to believe that they dare no longer mock the people with the word whilst the reality is unattainable without proper provision for self-government.



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