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“Back on to our Socialism.”

—J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE RIGHT HON. J.
RAMSAY MACDONALD.

By THE EDITOR.



MY DEAR MACDONALD,—I note with gladness that, in *Forward* this week, you say we must “get back on to our Socialism. In the end, it alone matters.”

Taken in conjunction with recent events and pronouncements, is this the preliminary and informal announcement of a change of policy? Perhaps you will read what follows as from an old friend and a propagandist of over forty years.

The Past.

The Government of which you were the head denationalised the town and works of Gretna, getting very poor prices for what was a sacrifice both of principle and of property. Your Government increased the expenditure on aircraft, and built unnecessary cruisers in fulfilment of the Admiralty's programme. The English sailors who broke the sea-power of Spain and of France did it with the odds always against them; but the British admirals of to-day appear to feel uneasy if they do not outnumber the enemy in ships, guns, and men alike.

Your Government did *not* nationalise the railways, although that was the policy of the Coalition as far back as 1918. Your Government did *not* nationalise the mines, though there was a promise solemnly made on behalf of the Coalition

Government, in advance, that the recommendations of the Sankey Commission would be carried out both in the spirit and the letter, and although nationalization has been indicated, when not specifically recommended, by one Royal Commission after another for a generation past. Indeed, so little has nationalization been in favour with you recently that even when moving a vote of censure on the Government for its failure to implement the recommendations of its own Coal Commission, you suggested, not public ownership, but "a public utility organization imposed upon a trust organization." This nebulous demi-semi suggestion promptly found favour with Mr. Lloyd-George, who described it as "very significant," and appeared to think that it offered possibilities for co-operation from his following such as could not be given for the Socialist policy of public ownership.

Roads.

When Mr. Lloyd-George first imposed the petrol tax in 1909 he said the motor traffic had increased so much that the time was rapidly arriving when additional roads would be necessary to carry it, the tax being designed to augment the road funds. Since then the traffic has increased hundreds-fold, while the smooth road necessary for it is neither necessary nor even suitable for the horse traffic of agricultural districts. Your Minister of Transport, at the end of months, had not got beyond the surveying stage for new roads.

For over a generation attention has been called to the immense energy generated by the tidal waters of the Severn. If harnessed it would suffice, say enthusiasts, to drive all the machinery in Britain. Your Government, after months, had not got beyond a reported preliminary survey, and now your successors turn to other widely remote fields for water-power, in some cases carrying out extensive cuttings to bring the water to the practicable point, while here is a wide river in a suitable area offering exceptional power and facilities still lying neglected.

Foreign v. Home Politics.

You were a success as Foreign Secretary, introducing a new spirit into international diplomacy; but the achievements of even the best foreign minister are often writ in

water—so much depends upon continuity of policy both from his side and from the other. The improved relations with France were a feather in your cap ; but Heriot the Possible has gone, and Poincare the Impossible again reigns in his stead ; not a penny of France's debt has been paid ; and in France as elsewhere our foreign relations are very much as if you had never been in the Foreign Office.

Some of us cannot but regret that your pre-occupation with foreign policy took your attention off domestic matters upon which a fruitful beginning, committing your successors, might have been made. For even a Government in a minority has great powers.

To have made a definite Socialist beginning with *all* the matters I have specified would have been perfectly possible. These things were not only expected of a Socialist Ministry, but all of them are so much in the line of natural evolution that it would not be too much to expect any or all of them from a ministry of any party sooner or later. The socialization of essential services is an elementary principle now with all schools of politics.

The Categorical Claim.

But the convinced Socialist believes that all large-scale production would be immensely improved in every way by being socialised. This is not a mere hope : it is a matter of experience. All services that have been nationalised or municipalised have been improved out of recognition.

We have all, I hope, been reading the excellent little book, “Practical Socialism,” by Dr. Addison, whose collection of specimen facts and figures from the experience of the Ministry of Munitions is worth a library of theory or academic discussion. The ex-Minister of Munitions has been converted to an acceptance of Socialism by the irrefragible evidence of how much quicker, cheaper, and better production could be carried on in the State factories than in private works.

State Efficiency.

The best equipped private factories could deliver only a third of the shells promised by a given date, whereas the State works were always well ahead with their deliveries. It was found that in three different well-equipped private

munition factories the time taken on a given process varied from 4 to 15 and from 3 to 10, the differences being due to degrees of bad management. By the collaboration which the Ministry secured, conditions more uniform were obtained, and waste was eliminated by the Government experts giving the private managers the benefit of their advice. In the manufacture of sulphuric acid, for instance, it was found that the proportion of unnecessary ash created was much in excess of what it ought to have been. Metal scrap—tin, steel, iron, and brass—often represents up to 50 per cent. of the material actually used. The Army Salvage Department and the Ministry of Munitions Scrap Department effected "immense savings" by turning over mountains of refuse to be treated in special factories which private enterprise would not have had any motive to set up.

As Dr. Addison shows, it was necessary to set up State factories, not merely to augment the supply of shells and explosives, but to show how much more cheaply the work could be done by Government servants than by private-enterprise patriots. After allowing handsome profits, it was found that using the experience of the State factories as a basis of costing, prices could be, and were, reduced by two-thirds. The private-enterprise patriots required 23s. for an 18-pounder shell; but the national factories at Dundee, Keighley, and elsewhere could produce them for 9s. The metal discs for which the armament firms charged 10d. were made by the national factories at $4\frac{1}{2}$ d., and tubes for which the private price was 1/6 were made by servants of the Ministry of Munitions for $4\frac{1}{8}$ d.

A State Departure.

Not only so. The Ministry made explosives that had not till then been made in this country on any scale at all. The acid, oleum, had to be got from America at £12 a-ton. But the Ministry set up a factory at a cost of £750,000, and by May 1916 it was found that the cost of erection had been saved, with £225,000 of a surplus, the gross saving being £975,050. For the oleum which cost £12 a-ton to buy from America could be manufactured by State employees at 55s., allowing for all reasonable overhead charges, and

paying exceptionally good wages. This was practically a new industry as founded by the Department of Explosives. The factory produced 2050 tons per week. Previous to this great experiment the British price for oleum, procurable only in small quantities, had been £30 per ton.

When, therefore, we are told that the State mismanages everything, we are justified in reversing the saying and claiming that the worst State and municipal management is better than the best private management so far as the results to the public are concerned. The different motives explain this. The private management exists to *take* from the public; the public management exists to give and serve.

The working folk of this country are not so dull as to miss the moral of the many facts that have been placed before them showing the advantages of public over private enterprise; and if this be the Socialism on which you are to fall back, my dear MacDonald, it is very safe ground and the only feasible line of social progress.

A Fantastic Alternative.

But of late there have been “many inventions.” The very latest is the Living Wage. I was amused to read last week-end an I.L.P. advertisement headed “Socialism in our Time—The Living Wage.” The lecturer was Bailie Dollan, who has made two appearances in this district—at Maud and Aberdeen—for the purpose of turning down Public Ownership and setting up the new demand for “A Living Wage.” In cross discussion it appears that Bailie Dollan, like Messrs. Brailsford and J. A. Hobson, does not believe in nationalization of mines and railways, because they do not pay, but pins his faith to the idea of a living wage being demanded for every worker whether the industry in which he (or she) is employed can pay it or not. The idea is that the people who are making high profits are to be taxed to pay a living wage to the employees of those who are not making such profits, even with wages as low as they are.

This is a new and non-Socialist stunt, like those other discarded I.L.P. novelties, the Right to Work and the Abolition of the Poor Law. That the Living Wage should be announced under the caption “Socialism in our Time” is a

ghastly revelation of the widely diverse expectations of two different kinds of foolish people.

I was not present at either of Bailie Dollan's meetings. Had I been at the Maud meeting (which is in my division) I should have applied his demand to the chief local industry, farming. At present farm servants are working for round about £30 per six months. To a married man who has "fee'd single," who gets his own food at the farm, and has no cottar allowance of cottage, milk, potatoes, and coal for his family, 22/6 a-week has to serve as a wage upon which to keep a wife and usually bairns, to feed him at week-ends, and to find him in clothes, washing, and boots. In his case a living wage means three times as much as he is getting.

I believe you know as well as I do that £3 7s. 6d. a-week to a farmhand is an impossibility in any country of the world. You may alter agriculture—I hope we shall improve it out of recognition, by first Control and then complete Socialization—but in the meantime it is beginning at the wrong end of the process altogether to say you must first have out of the industry what is not in it. To pay £2 5s. more a-week to a million and a quarter farmhands would require £146,240,000 a-year. Don't Messrs. Hobson and Brailsford wish they may get this modest instalment of their total demand! The idea of everybody working hard in order to hand over the surplus as subsidy to the unprofitable industries is the most fantastic conception ever launched in the name of politics.

A Time to be Bold.

The electorate is with us now. We cannot do more than win every by-election that takes place. Our men win on programmes of nationalization and municipalization, public ownership, Britain for the British, in increasing measure. There is nothing unreasonable, nothing new in that demand. It does not mean "Socialism in our time"—not the whole of Socialism—not the socialization of all industries and services in our time. But it means the steady, gradual extension of the sphere of Collective Ownership, the steady exclusion of the predatory classes from one field of exploitation after another. If a Tory Government, hating Socialism,

is nevertheless driven or tempted to nationalise two services in one year—broadcasting and electricity—is it not reasonable to expect rather more from a Government which has nationalization as its chief business? This is not asking for the extraction of rabbits from hats, but only that the nation's business shall be managed by the nation's responsible servants instead of by the nation's irresponsible and often incompetent masters.

In the long run men hit only that at which they aim. To make up our minds as to what we want is the first essential. We need not be afraid of saying we want unlimited Socialization, the continuation of the process already long since begun, whereby the State in the country and the local authorities in the towns have become the largest and the best servants of the public, neither scamping the work nor overcharging the price, the last and best and only unfailing friend of the citizen when all other friends fail him. There need be no confiscation, no violent dislocations, no injustice done to any one. Nay, it is only by this process that the daily injustices, confiscations, and dislocations of capitalistic society can be ended.

During the War years new departures were made, experiments launched, records beaten, and all very rapidly. This is not necessary in peace. All we ask is that Collectivist principles which have proved efficacious in the hands of non-Socialists should have a trial from the party to which they properly belong.

Collectivism—the communal way of doing things—is really the oldest principle in politics. Liberalism and Toryism are growths of yesterday by comparison.

Collectivism is not a wild, “red,” foolish, or desperate last resort, but the extension of law and order over chaos and inefficiency, the fulfilment of that “increasing purpose” which runs through the ages of social evolution. We must have it in increasing measure no matter what set of politicians we elect. But progress is faster with willing agents, and time is precious. The double holocaust of last week in our murderously mismanaged mines is proof that the poet was right when he wrote “on every wind of heaven a wasted life

goes by." Individualism is the enemy. Have at it, old friend, in the name of Humanity! There is no better work to which a man may set his hand, and, unlike Mr. Baldwin, you have the touchstone of great principles to guide you.

Since the first sentinel was nominated by brute selection to keep watch for the feeding herd, since the first naked post runner was elected to carry other people's messages, since the later time when the folk-moot abdicated its functions in favour of one elected representative to a Witanagemote (or assembly of the wise), the Socialist principle has increasingly been at work. It is not the Collectivist who is the heretic and rebel, but those who would keep society a chaos of warring atoms, each secreting with feeble greed and stupid jealousy for itself, and incapable of co-operating for the grander results of associated effort in which man diminishes his disabilities and increases his powers a millionfold.

Yours in real fraternity,

JAMES LEATHAM.

WHAT we want is to stop the State being used for the benefit of a small number of individuals at the expense of all the rest.

PRIVATE.



James Leatham, Esq.,
Turiff,
ABERDEENSHIRE.

4th
April,
1927.

My Dear Leatham,

Thank you very much for that admirable letter you wrote in the "Gateway". We have not always seen eye to eye, but at any rate your criticism has always been of the helpful kind and not of the showy and stupid kind. I do not know what is coming over the I.L.P. these days. It has fallen into the hands of people with grievances who are approaching our large and difficult problems in a small and petty-minded way.

I hope you find life tolerably bearable. One day when I am in the North I should like very much to see you; but you are just at a very awkward distance from Lossiemouth. I may be motoring through Aberdeen sooner or later, and I will see if I can take you in the way in that event.

With kindest regards,

I am,
Yours very sincerely,

Mansel Macdonald