

A Socialist on the People's Front

The professor of political economy at Johns Hopkins argues for a permanent advance guard: the united front

By Broadus Mitchell

AS I understand it, the chief incentive at this time for a people's front in the United States is the fear of fascism here. This is held by many to justify soft-pedaling of the demand for a coöperative society, in favor of active working relationship between radicals and organized workers and other merely progressive groups.

I wonder whether the fear of fascism in this country is not too insistent, and whether the swallowing up of radical advocacy would not be an unnecessary sacrifice.

It is clear to me that there should be the closest teamwork between all who believe that our problems can be solved only through the substitution of a coöperative for a capitalist society. This means, chiefly, a united front of the Communist and Socialist parties. Our theoretical and tactical differences are slight as contrasted with our broad similarity of objective.

I have very little patience with the divisions within each of these parties, and less patience with the energetic criticisms of Socialists by Communists and the other way round. Perhaps I am uninformed and inexperienced, and thus do not appreciate the importance of the causes of conflict. But I put my complaint on very simple grounds. Relatively few of the American people know of our internal differences, and fewer understand them. They are the staple of intra-radical debate, but they never reach the people whose opinions we are supposed to be influencing. The foolishness of these quarrels among ourselves is evident from another fact. The great enemy of a coöperative order is not organized capitalist opposition, but the ignorance and indifference of the millions. The only effective attack upon this slothful public mentality is constant teaching in exceedingly simple terms.

That sort of advocacy, instead of being subordinated, should be emphasized. In order to lead the labor movement, radicals should not get so close to the slow-moving body of workers that they are lost in the throng. It seems to me that Mr. Browder, if I understand some of his writings, is in danger of being more the comrade than the counselor. Socialists and Communists must think of themselves, in the next years, as educators rather than as important political parties. True, we must have enough voting adherents to keep ourselves on the ballots, and to prevent the drying up of our springs. But for a while yet, it strikes me, we must beckon rather than lead the great mass which will one day demand and make a collectivist society in America.

We constantly chafe because we have little direct power. But two rewards we do possess. One is influence out of all proportion to our numbers, and the other is dignity and consistency.

As to the first, we make important forward steps much easier for the old parties than they would be if we had not urged these steps for years beforehand. By our lonesome perseverance we take the curse off certain proposals, so that they are tolerably familiar and seem not so heinous by the time conservative groups are compelled to embrace them.

As to dignity and consistency of radical demands, it is worth something to be free of the vexations of opportunism. Ally ourselves too closely with lagging mass movements, and we are driven to all sorts of shifts to reconcile theory with practice. Particular leaders, however progressive and promising, are apt to change and disappoint us. Rather than forced explanations, false excuses, and disingenuous moderation, give me the voice crying in the wilderness. It will carry farther, and the echo will ring longer.

I am prompted to this optimism by the conviction that time works on the side of purity of judgment. In my judgment, no matter what radicals do, the drift in this country is

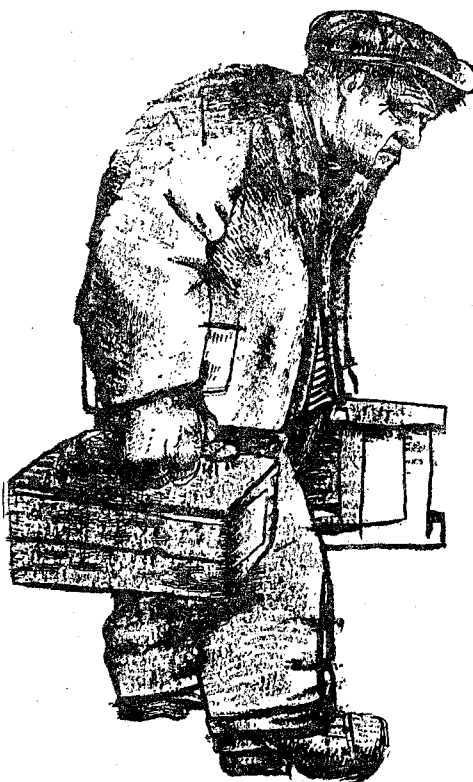
inevitably toward a collectivist society. The next depression or the next war will witness degrees of government intervention in economic life never dreamed before. Subsidy, control, incentive are going to be supplied not by individuals, but by organized society. We shall be unable to live, let alone make the most of our abundant opportunities, without organized direction. The devolution of capitalism—quite as swift in the relatively prosperous times ahead as in the slump which will ensue—is hastening us to such social decisions as radicals could never produce. We must be ready, in society's coming dismay, to point to an exit and find ourselves trusted as guides. That can be done only if we remain true to our beliefs—true in our public utterances as well as in our own minds.

It is a mistake to be shy of social theory. If ever the world could afford to see a few people set aside to think out its largest problems, now is the time.

But Socialists and Communists cannot be good standard-bearers of the coming economic order unless they march together. Why our disputes and jealousies and back-biting? We exchange positions so often on important points that a sense of humor alone should persuade us to unite. One year the Communists are the dogmatists, with the Socialists more conciliatory and "realistic." A little while passes, and the Socialists are the economic ascetics, while the Communists mingle in the marts. At one time the Socialists eschew all violence, while the Communists are believers in class war. Later on Socialists are the more vigorous in recruiting volunteers for Spain. Mere increasing age is apt to alter a man's views; his economics changes with his metabolism. Then why harp on differences?

My impression is that natural resources and human ingenuity in America are too great, and the democratic tradition too real, to make fascism a likely development here. The task of radicals, then, is not hurriedly to muster the workers to prevent their being instantly overwhelmed by capitalist governmental dictatorship. Rather we radicals are for some years yet to be pioneers, explorers, scouts spying out the land ahead and bringing back reports of its abundant promises.

The front I want is a front of leaders with courage, imagination, endurance. The mass will straggle unevenly behind, but will be farther forward because the advance guard stays in advance, and does not scuttle back to camp with the host every night.



John Heliker

The Lion and the Lamb

The British national government and the Labor Party leadership have been cohabiting cosily, but a changed relationship threatens

By G. D. H. Cole

INDUSTRIALLY, the British labor movement appears to be waking up fast under the influence of the rearmament boom and the consequent fall in unemployment among the skilled workers, except in the depressed areas. But politically, British labor still remains, over a large part of the country, fast asleep; the industrial awakening will have to go a great deal further before any corresponding ferment is set up in the Labor Party as a whole. I stress this point at the very outset because I think the situation is widely misunderstood abroad. The dispute between the official leadership of the Labor Party and the advocates of working-class unity bulks so large in the newspapers and in the minds of an active minority of Socialists and Labor leaders that it is very easy to overlook the fact that the main body of trade unionists and even of Labor Party members has so far neither taken sides nor evinced any real interest in the struggle.

For an explanation of the present divisions in the ranks of British labor, both industrial and political, it is necessary to go back to the general strike of 1926 and to the collapse of the labor government in 1931. The general strike, a hopelessly mismanaged affair from start to finish, was never meant to happen; the threat of it was a piece of bluff which was never meant to be called. Consequently, no preparations were made for conducting it. There was no sufficient recognition that a general strike, however purely "industrial" its objects might be, was bound to be treated as a political challenge by the government in power, and put down with all the resources of the state. The strike, once called, could not possibly succeed unless it went far enough actually to pull down the government and put a Labor government in its place. But the leaders had no thought of doing this, which would have amounted to a revolution. Therefore, the strike was bound to fail, and to leave behind it a legacy of serious disillusionment.

THE collapse of 1926 left the trade-union movement with its funds practically exhausted, open to widespread victimization at the hands of employers. In the next few years membership seriously declined, and the movement was quite incapable of conducting any large-scale strike. The economic depression which began in 1929 involved further loss of membership and delayed the rebuilding of resources. Even today, the trade-union movement is far poorer than it was before 1926; and its leadership, mindful of the state of its coffers, and fearful of another real trial of strength with the

forces of capitalism, is very reluctant to take any risks despite the obvious opportunities presented to it by the armament boom.

The general strike weakened the trade unions; but for the time it strengthened political Labor; for political action seemed to offer a means of retrieving lost positions. But the Labor government of 1929-31 speedily dis-



"What did finally happen to Ramsay MacDonald?"

illusioned its supporters. The ignominious collapse which finally drove it from office immeasurably weakened Labor's political position among the electors. Faced with the treason of its best-known political leaders, the Labor Party membership at first reacted leftwards, and the Labor Party Conference of 1932 declared emphatically, against the wish of the platform, in favor of a more advanced socialist policy. The leaders, however, remained for the most part the same people who had followed Mr. MacDonald between 1929 and 1931, and the policy which they desired to pursue was still just as gradualist as ever. Moreover, the defection of MacDonald and Snowden had seriously weakened the influence of the socialist non-trade-union elements within the party; and the trade-union leaders, in their mood of industrial pacifism, threw their weight heavily on the side of a right-wing political policy. Accordingly, the leftward swing of 1932 did not last long. At subsequent conferences the trade unions and the right-wing leaders had matters mostly their own way.

This is still the situation; but matters have been complicated by the change of policy in the Soviet Union since the consolidation of fascist aggressive power. This has made the Communists sincerely eager for a working-class united front against fascist aggression, whereas previously their advocacy of working-class unity took rather the form of endeavoring to detach the working-class from allegiance to "reactionary" leaders. As the Communists began working sincerely for unity, there appeared inside the Labor Party an organized left wing, pursuing the same objective. Among both groups the desire for united anti-fascist action was, of course, greatly strengthened by the outbreak of the fascist rebellion in Spain and by the obvious intention of Germany and Italy to stir up fascism at every opportunity and within every country.

If the only question had been one of anti-fascism, it would have been possible to unite the entire labor movement, except the extreme pacifist wing headed by George Lansbury, behind a policy of collective democratic resistance to fascist aggression. But there were cross-currents. In the first place, the right-wing leaders of the Labor Party were afraid that any hint of common action with the Communists would prejudice their chances of capturing the moderate voters, and, even more, that it would provoke a development of fascism in Great Britain. They had hopes, like the German Social-Democrats before them, that if they sufficiently affirmed their respectability, the ruling classes would not feel it necessary to hire thugs to bang them over the head. This view appears to me to be singularly mistaken; but it is nevertheless quite widely held in private, though seldom affirmed in public, among "moderate" Labor men.

Much more important, however, from the standpoint of its influence on the official attitude towards working-class unity was the stand taken by the trade-union leaders. Politically, the Communists have been, for the past year or two, on their best behavior, because