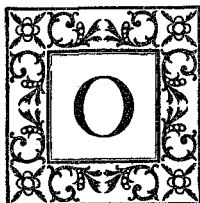


# British Labor Steps Ahead

ITS INFLUENCE ON LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES

BY EDWIN W. HULLINGER

Author of "Radicalism in the United States"



OF all social developments in the Anglo-Saxon world during the last half-century, along with the growth of our modern industrial system, the rise to power of organized labor in both England and the United States stands out with commanding importance. It is a factor that has intrinsically changed the social and economic picture in the United States, and in England labor is already becoming a political feature of steadily growing moment—despite the defeat of the Labor party at the polls last autumn. I say Anglo-Saxon world, because, although labor is moving into prominence in all civilized countries, it is in the Anglo-Saxon lands that it has reached its highest development. In France the growth of trade-unionism has been held in check to an extent by the overpowering individualism of the French worker, who has repeatedly refused in time of crisis to sacrifice for the common cause what he believed to be his own immediate personal advantage. German labor, while better organized, has also suffered from lack of moral courage. And Italian labor is momentarily eclipsed by Fascism.

From a starting-point of virtual impotence in the last century labor has risen, in America and England, to a point where it is now able to make or unmake social destiny. Labor has a human and economic strength almost equal to capital, and must hereafter be taken seriously into account in any calculation of the future. The balance of social forces has been fundamentally changed from what it was seventy years ago. He who would look into to-morrow must not neglect to study labor of to-day—its structure,

methods, and, most important, the kind of men it is bringing to the fore.

Without entering into too great detail, it may also be said, in my opinion, that labor itself is now on the threshold of a new phase in its development. Its first cycle—its struggle for recognition and the fight exclusively for higher wages—is nearing its end, both aims being on a fair way toward attainment. (And in the final analysis, the raising of wages is a process which, by its nature, cannot go on indefinitely.) A new objective is beginning to take form, and this objective will be, as I see the signs, the great issue of the next century—labor's demand for a share in the actual control of industry. This demand is already prominent in England. It is less emphatic, but nevertheless audible, in America. It is a development in the evolution of the movement which is not hard to understand.

It is partly because British labor has already entered this second cycle of its development, while American labor is still hardly emerged from the first period, that the British labor movement offers a peculiarly attractive field of study to the student of American social economics. Partly, also, because on account of the language tie, British labor is coming to have an increasing influence on American labor at the moment, although in so many ways the two national movements are so different. And, passing over all these facts, there is still another feature of the British trade-union movement that compels attention—the fact that it has been able to develop from its own ranks a type of leader distinctly above the usual run of leaders in the American labor movement—a real labor statesman, whose capacities compare not unfavorably with the fine minds in "capitalist" groups in America.

## II

In attempting any study of the British labor movement, it is necessary first of all to visualize clearly the organic difference in the structure of the country as compared with our own. It is a difference which, in my opinion, has played an extremely important part in accounting both for the form which the movement has taken and for the superior type of leader at the head of the English movement.

The British labor movement came into existence in a social organism that was intrinsically different from that of the United States, a country in its formative stage, with its outlines constantly changing and its population and classes in constant shift—a land which until very recently has been conspicuous owing to the relative absence of fixed lines between the social groups. British trade-unionism was created in a country that had long since reached a definite social mould. The island's population has been firmly fixed for centuries in a "caste" system which has furnished the background for all of England's internal history since feudalism, a system to which the whole mental attitude of the nation had adapted itself. British trade-unionism had to extend itself inside class walls too solidly established in tradition to be broken down, which reached through both economic and social aspects of national life.

England was a land where cobblers' sons were cobblers, traders' sons merchants, and where nobody expected anything else. Generally speaking, each class filled a definite sphere in economic and social life, kept distinctly to itself, and had its distinct class characteristics (which extended even to physical conformity of the face and manner of speech).

Even to-day, despite the corrosive influences of twentieth-century democratic political currents, these differences constitute a real human factor in national life from which no individual can escape fundamentally. A member of one class stands out conspicuously in the midst of a group belonging to another class; and since the control of industrial affairs still rests largely with the upper classes, "lower-class" origin is something that is a de-

cided handicap to a member of that group moving in circles where his superiors predominate. The war made a breach in the system, it is true. Fighting side by side, men came to see human virtues in men in other social groups which they may have hardly suspected before, and the economic upheaval since the armistice has broken down some barriers which had seemed so high. But even the war did not sweep the system away. And it also must be said that most of the barriers that are crumbling now are those which separated the groups in the upper half of society from each other; the human gulf between the upper half and the bottom half is still very wide!

Perhaps one reason class consciousness is so persistent is because it has so many physical "landmarks" that make it hard to overlook. The difference in speech is certainly a big factor. It is a very important reason for the fact that England still has separate school systems for the different classes. A member of the upper classes cannot afford to send his children to the free state schools to mingle with children of the Cockneys and acquire an *accent* that would be a serious social, and even economic, handicap to them all their lives. This is a practical, rock-bottom fact which no American parent, however democratic in tastes, could afford to disregard if he were in England with his family.

When modern industrialism developed in England, the caste system automatically adjusted itself around it, each class taking over and manning a distinct part of the productive organism. True, there were a few modern Dick Whittingtons—even Tsaristic Russia had her share—but, broadly speaking, the classes continued in their distinctive spheres, and the personal trials of those who tried to break over the lines were painful to any one with the susceptibilities that usually go with a more developed character. Nor was it possible, in the "tight little" isle, to escape from the shadow of one's past, as one could in America.

I have gone into this situation in such detail because if one does clearly get hold of its *human value*, there is so much in present-day English life that will be so clear.

It makes clear, first of all, why the British "proletariat" was able to retain inside its own ranks for services in leading the labor movement the best brains it produced. History has shown, particularly that of our own country, that executive caliber is not exclusively a class affair. But in the United States, when the proletariat did bring forth such a person, he almost inevitably soon rose out of his class into another higher social group, where he found better opportunities for self-development and ceased to be a proletarian!

And still more significant, the English caste system has furnished the mould upon which the modern labor movement is based, both in its economic and political phases, and explains, in my opinion, to a great extent some of the fundamental differences between the British movement and trade-unionism in the United States.

British labor is, and always has been, dynamically a class phenomenon. It receives its impetus from the class urge, and owes its success to its clever exploitation of class consciousness, a class feeling that was already a deep reality and had only to be diverted to its use. It began with a definite recognition of the fact of class, and shaped its whole line of thought accordingly. In fact, its leaders were incapable of thinking in other terms—a fact which also will throw some light on their susceptibility to socialism, a system which bases itself upon the pillars of class consciousness, and which also puts forward *one* method by means of which the lower class could participate in the control of things. (Nor must one also overlook the fact of geographic propinquity: Karl Marx's body still lies in a cemetery in Highgate, a region of north London.)

The rank and file of labor in England has a conception of the "eternal" in class which American laborers could not have, hoping, as nearly all of them did until very recently, to become capitalists themselves some day! As *individuals* the British workmen had virtually no hope, almost no thought, one might say, of coming to share in the management. From the birth of modern trade-unionism the leaders have been convinced of the futility of trying to participate in the con-

trol of industry except through *group force* and *group action*. The struggle for wages came first, of course, because one had to live, but the other objective was always in the back of their heads.

Under these circumstances the early leap into politics was quite understandable, especially since labor had at its head men of a type that would be attracted by the broader career. And labor's success during the last decade has exceeded expectations. Labor politicians were obliged, it is true, even in their own class, to overcome a certain remnant of feudal psychology which may be best expressed in the words of a Midland village laborer, who shouted out at a recent labor rally: "What? Do you want us to turn agin the gentry what keeps us?"

This idea explains why certain portions of the population that are naturally proletarian are still outside the party. But in the long run, class instincts have usually proved stronger than feudalism, and labor is advancing steadily in political strength. Only a few years ago, it could scarcely muster several hundred thousand votes. Last fall, despite its loss of forty parliamentary seats, the party polled 5,000,000 ballots—a million more popular votes than it ever had received before.

To-day the political and industrial aspects of labor are inseparably intertwined. They are controlled virtually by the same men, and are simply two phases of the same thing. Most of the members of MacDonald's cabinet returned from their ministerial offices in Westminster to their old duties in trade-union offices, from which point they direct both political and industrial policies.

Labor's entry into politics has also furnished the British proletariat with a fresh urge to develop itself, in that it has opened the glamour of a parliamentary career to many with latent ability who otherwise would probably have remained silent. It has also been partly responsible for attracting to the folds of labor a number from the intelligentsia, who have deliberately left their own class and offered their services to labor, either for reasons of personal ambition—the Labor party offers much the quickest way to parliamentary prominence—or real altruistic devotion to the cause of the "under

dog." Some of the finest minds in the labor movement belong to this element, which is very active and has had a distinct influence on the group. For, in addition to the services of their wits, they brought with them new methods and ideas that have left an impression that is definite, even if difficult to measure finitely.

One of the most important of these was the idea of *scientific research* as a preliminary to either industrial or political action; another was the idea of education inside the group—two features which make British labor stand out in the world labor movement of to-day.\*

### III

PROBABLY no phase of life seems more remote from romance than statistical research! Yet, as I have picked up again during these last months the story of the development of this phase of the labor movement, I have found a story that had a very human appeal—the story of how the idea was born, twenty years ago, in a little clique of intellectuals who, in something of the crusade spirit, broke away from their class and joined labor; how their proffer was at first scorned as a "highbrow" and "upper-class" thing; how gradually they prevailed, until to-day the little bureau they opened has the support of nearly every local union in England, and serves as a kind of intellectual attorney to trade-unionism in general, while another bureau, similarly patterned, is an integral part of the official machinery of the Labor party and the Trade-Union Congress (the British A. F. of L.)

The research idea actually originated in a club of college and literary men, called the Fabian Society, which used to meet in London to discuss social problems. The group included men who have become foremost writers of the day: George Ber-

nard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and the two men who, strictly speaking, became the fathers of the research movement in labor, Sydney Webb and G. H. D. Cole. In 1908 these last two actually opened a small office, labor's pioneer bureau, which continues to-day as the "unofficial" bureau of the trade-union movement. Both Cole and Webb were Oxford men. Both have since become prominent as writers on economic subjects. Cole, the younger of the two, has lately branched into fiction. Two of his novels were recently published in the United States.

The early years of the venture were very difficult. Since neither Cole nor Webb was wealthy, both having to earn their living at the same time, they had to depend chiefly upon the support of the society. Many of the Fabians lent a hand when necessary, among whom Shaw was one of the most active (he still occasionally takes on a research assignment in a pinch!).

The first problem was to gain recognition from labor, a task by no means easy. They had to overcome a considerable amount of class antagonism and suspicion, traces of which I found even to-day in certain branches of labor when the "highbrows" came under discussion! They had to prove their usefulness, show labor that it paid to know definitely the ground it stood upon!

Perseverance won, however, and thanks partly to the fact that labor had at its head men of above the average vision, British trade-unionism adopted the highbrows into its midst. To-day this pioneer bureau is self-supporting, receiving regular subscriptions from nearly every local union in England. It is an integral part of the labor machinery. Very few unions think of taking any important step without first appealing to it for information. It has a regular staff of twelve persons and relies on volunteer reservists for emergencies. Cole himself recently resigned from actual charge of the bureau, to devote his time to teaching in the working men's classes. But Mrs. Cole is still second in command, and both Mr. and Mrs. Webb keep in close touch.

In the present headquarters, near the Victoria Station, Mrs. Cole told of their struggles and experiences. The room was

\* In this connection, it must be noted that several branches of American labor very recently have begun to show signs of awakening to the need for regular research as well as schools for the development of union leaders. The New York Federation of Labor has made several praiseworthy experiments with schools of this kind. And in the field of research the National Union of Ladies Garment Workers, in 1923, commissioned Doctor Louis Levine, formerly of the University of Montana, to spend eighteen months in research for the purpose of compiling a history of the union as a social group since its beginning. Doctor Levine's treatise, published in book form recently, is a constructive work, and will be, it is to be hoped, only the pioneer of other similar efforts. But as a group, American organized labor has not realized the value of statistical inquiry, nor has scientific research become a feature of the movement as a whole.



small, but stuffed with documents and books, part of the "morgue" and reference library they have built up. The service occupies one floor.

"We went from one extreme to another," she recounted. "At first the unions would pay no attention to us. Once they got the idea in their heads that we were of use, they swamped us! A crisis would arise. We would receive a frantic call for all the facts about so-and-so in twenty-four hours. They never seemed to realize that research takes time. Of course we couldn't get them all they wanted overnight, but we were able to reach into our files and bring out quantities of material already on hand on this situation, and we immediately would send out a call to our reservists. The lot of us would then plunge into a day-and-night orgy of research for a few days!"

Mrs. Cole revealed that the bureau is operated on a per-capita cost of only *thirty-five cents per year* to the labor movement! She added: "If we can do this, and in a poor country, think how much more American labor could accomplish!"

After the armistice the Labor party and the trade-union congress decided to open an "official" research bureau of its own, which would be more immediately at the disposal of the executive staff at Eccleston Square, leaving the Cole-Webb bureau to continue to look after the individual unions. Under Arthur Greenwood, M.P. (a member of MacDonald's ministry), this bureau has done some very commendable work. Several times it has taken the initiative in a political crisis, and has been able to influence to an extent opinion outside its own group. During the Irish crisis Greenwood and two colleagues went into the fighting area, interviewed hundreds of partisans at "court martials," held almost under fire, and conferred secretly with leaders of both factions while sentries watched at the windows to prevent surprise. The report which they brought back laid down in a general way the plan which finally was adopted by Lloyd George. Like the Cole bureau, it is continually following up new lines of inquiry between assignments.

During Labor's term in office the party instituted an elaborate form of committee research, the Labor members of Parlia-

ment being distributed among more than a score of committees, each charged with the duty of keeping the party posted on its particular field. This system has fallen into disrepair since the party left power, but still functions, the committees now meeting once or twice a month instead of twice a week.

In trying to measure the concrete results of this phase of labor one must be careful to bear in mind that the rôle of these bureaux is only advisory, of course. The findings are not binding, nor have the recommendations always been followed. British labor has made some exceedingly stupid blunders since the war, even if it did have the means of knowing better. But all things considered, the existence of this system has unquestionably had a marked effect on the stability of the movement, particularly on its leadership, and it has had a very salutary, sobering influence on habits of thought. One of the most eloquent testimonials of the Cole-Webb bureau's effectiveness was an incident during the great mine strike after the war. When the mine-owners and the union leaders came to meet, the former found, as one of them expressed it at the time, "men who knew quite as much about the mining business as we did ourselves!"

The presence of this factor of research behind it, has also undoubtedly contributed to an extent to labor's political prestige. It has enabled labor to step upon the scene with an air of authority that it otherwise could not have had, and capitalize the Englishman's inborn respect for figures and "facts." It certainly is one of the big reasons for the respect which labor's political adversaries have for it. And it must be remembered that the research bureaux have also served as publicity directors for the movement during the last decade and have aided greatly in helping labor to interpret itself more intelligently to the public at large. . . .

There is another intellectual phase of the labor movement which space prevents treating at length here, but which will certainly exert a growing influence in the future—the educational programme (another Fabian idea). Already night-schools have been opened in all the large industrial centres of England. The total en-

rolment is well over 40,000. The classes deal with a wide range of subjects, from industrial history, the history of trade-unionism, to literature. The schools are supported partly by trade-union contributions, partly by *government subsidy*.

One class which I visited, in company with Mr. Cole, dealt with the development of trade-unionism. It met in the evening, in a conference-room in the University of London. The ages of the pupils ranged from twenty-one to fifty years, and all came from the "lower middle class," a group of recent proletarian origin, which had had the initiative to push themselves into positions requiring an amount of executive ability. One was a postal clerk, another a bookkeeper, another a trade-union secretary, etc. All, Cole explained, were under training to become leaders or teachers.

Thus far the main object of the night-schools has been to develop leaders, although the system is slowly extending itself downward.

This group had been together three years, and showed surprising grasp and acumen. The material Cole gave them was solid, heavy subject-matter, such as might have figured in an average university course in economics or statistics. The approach was objective.

In fact, the labor-union movement generally is becoming greatly intrigued by the idea of education. Another group, the "Plebs," who represent the very small left or radical wing in labor, have established a rival system of schools, in which Marxianism is openly taught. It is charged in labor circles that this group originally received money from Moscow. But most people believe that they are virtually self-continent at the moment, Moscow having terminated its subsidy, the story runs, when it saw that their influence was so small! J. F. Horrabin, a successful cartoonist, and one of the ruling spirits among the Plebs, insisted with all seeming sincerity that the schools were now supported only by sums from their own pockets. He added, however, that they did not wish to have help from the British Government, because they preferred to be free to teach a definite Marxian interpretation of things social and economic.

While these "left" wing schools are not so numerous or large as the official labor colleges, they constitute a factor in the British industrial situation which is not quite so reassuring as one might wish.

The general aim of the British radicals, bluntly speaking, is virtual sabotage. They have no confidence in the possibility of evolving the present system into anything of merit, and think that the "quickest way out of the mess" is to bring matters to such a bad state that the masses will rise in despair. For this reason they are fundamentally against parliamentary methods and in favor of direct industrial action.

#### IV

It remains, now, to project the general profile of British labor upon the canvas of American industrial conditions, a process which brings a number of interesting points into view.

We have seen the differences in the form and spirit of the British labor movement, why it is it has been able to produce a superior type of leader, and how British labor came to extend itself into the political field. We have reviewed the research phase of the movement, a feature only slightly developed in American labor, and have noted the beginnings of an important educational programme within unionism.

In a word, British labor possesses an all-round group compactness which American labor does not now possess, and internal conditions have been such that it has acted as a group in spheres which American labor has not tried to capture as a group. British labor, for this reason, has a wider orbit of social influence.

But when we come to examine closely the great bulk of labor and the physical conditions of life of the individual trade-unionists, one finds that in a material way large sections of British labor are decidedly worse off than is American labor. A recent investigation by the International Labor Bureau at Geneva brought out that the *real* wage in America is more than twice that in Great Britain. In other words, British labor has not been able to raise its standard of life to the

level American labor has attained. I say attained, because, despite the more recent growth of a more human attitude toward things in American industry, it must be admitted, in my opinion, that it was the influence of the American Federation of Labor, expressed in strikes and repeated threats of industrial pressure, that really brought wages up and thereby raised the standard of life of the American working man to a point unequalled in any other part of the world.

British labor's backwardness in this respect is due first to the much greater poverty of the country—a factor which few Americans stop to consider—which has made fewer profits to distribute in the form of wages. A second factor is the fact that the British worker himself is a much less energetic workman than the American. He works more slowly, is inclined to take things as they come, and certainly has very little of the personal interest in the success of production which American capital and labor are trying hard now to encourage. Part of this is traceable to his lethargic nature, and part, I believe, to the relative hopelessness of his outlook on life.

In handling the human mass of labor, the British labor leaders have had difficulties to overcome which have not arisen in the brighter, more enterprising American rank and file.

In a few ways, also—due to a great extent to the doggedness of the rank and file—British labor has advanced less rapidly in its industrial conceptions than American labor. Its opposition to the introduction of machinery and labor-saving devices has been more protracted. In the mining industry, for instance, this stubbornness has held the industry back noticeably. Again, a very practical reason may be found, however: in America,

with our steadily broadening resources, it was not so serious for a few men to be displaced by a machine. There were new fields to enter, where the labor-saving device would increase production. In England the field was limited. The country was already greatly overpopulated, and the resources well exploited. There might not be a new job for the men replaced by machinery! This terrible fear has also figured in the rank and file's insistence on very strict, and often very selfish, apprenticeship regulations, which have hobbled British production to the extent of drawing indignant protest from the employing and middle classes.

In conclusion, then, in a number of ways British labor is distinctly in advance of American labor, due to the circumstances enumerated before. It has adopted certain methods which American labor would do well to copy. British labor has definitely begun to attack the solution of social problems which American labor has not taken up in earnest. England is destined, I believe, to be a laboratory in which some very interesting social experiments will be made during the next few decades.

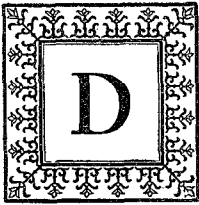
But I also believe that America will, possibly a little later, possibly as soon, undertake the working out of details in the readjustment of our social order which will be quite as constructive and important. American labor will surely play its part in this. It quite conceivably will follow a different course from British labor. Conditions in the two lands are different. But in the end it is America that offers the greatest possibilities for effective social workmanship. Ours is the new organism. American labor has better human material to work with, and is not handicapped by the overshadowing poverty of the Old World countries.



# Crime and Sentimentality

BY JAMES L. FORD

Author of "Forty Odd Years in the Literary Shop," "My Memories of the Early Eighties," etc.



**D**URING the past decade crime and such allied topics as criminals, their treatment and reform, and prison management have been more conspicuous in print than at any time within the memory of persons now living. We have only to read the discussions carried on in the press and periodical literature, and even in certain works of fiction, and to listen to the lectures of so-called eminent criminologists and to the well-meaning persons whose utterances reveal their own lack of knowledge and experience, to understand why so little of benefit to humanity has resulted from it all. Crime still flourishes as seldom before, prison discipline has relaxed, and hardened offenders are not infrequently let loose on the community by the parole board or suspended sentence imposed by a magistrate, when they should have been locked up. The truth is that the subject in every one of its many forms has been viewed sentimentally instead of through the spectacles of pure reason, and far more interest is shown in the criminals than in their victims.

Sentimentality may be described as a flabby, unwholesome attitude of mind that sees only the lesser aspects of affairs and is blind to the greater issues. Justice has no place in its philosophy, but instead a maudlin sympathy for the undeserving which takes heed of the welfare of convicts and gives no thought to those who have suffered by them. Sentimentality is rarely found under the same thatch as the power and willingness to reason. It must not be confounded with worthy sentiment from which it sometimes springs—or falls—and which it resembles as synthetic gin resembles honest liquor.

The very essence of sentimentality may be found in the act by which the historic

name of Blackwell was removed from the East River island which has long sheltered so many of the city's evil-doers, paupers, and other unfortunates, and the ridiculous word "Welfare" put in its place. There is the very quintessence of sentimentalism in the recent slogan of "sunshine in every cell," signifying that evil-doers deserve the heaven-sent blessings which comparatively few New York flat-dwellers enjoy.

There is no more serious matter among the many difficult ones that now confront us, none more worthy of sane and sober consideration at the hands of those who understand it, than that of crime. To treat it sentimentally is as absurd as to treat the Steel Trust or the freight traffic from such a maudlin point of view. But when a subject is allowed to take its place among the various "problems" that now harass us, it is certain to let loose a flood of foolish counsel and undigested information from the lips of those who are the least qualified to speak.

I have read with an interest not always unmixed with amusement many of the essays written about crime and its punishment, and one of these impressed itself strongly on my mind. Like all sentimental efforts, it concerned itself sympathetically with the criminal and paid absolutely no heed to the victim. The author of this contribution suggested as a substitute for the death penalty the choice of three methods by which a man convicted of murder might expiate his crime. He should be allowed to choose between death by hanging, electrocution, or the lethal chamber; life imprisonment at hard labor, without hope of pardon, or the delivery of his body to medical authorities for experimental research, by which is meant inoculation by every variety of noxious germ. In fact, the whole tendency of the scheme is to enable the murderer to escape the worst conse-