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# THE NEW CONSTITUTION OF THE LABOUR PARTY.

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**A Party of Handworkers and Brainworkers.**

**The Labour Programme and Prospects.**

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BY SIDNEY WEBB.

**T**HE proposal to reorganise the Labour Party, formulated by its national executive, and accepted with practical unanimity by the Party Conference, may well prove an event of far-reaching political importance. Instead of a sectional and somewhat narrow group, what is established is a national Party, open to anyone of the 16,000,000 electors agreeing with the Party programme.

The Labour Party, formally established in 1900, has hitherto been, essentially, a federation of Trade Unions (mainly the larger ones, with over 2,000,000 membership); three relatively small Socialist Societies (with less than 50,000 membership): Trades Councils and Local Labour Parties in some dozens of towns; and a few other organisations, such as co-operative societies and the Women's Labour League. Its first big success was achieved at the General Election of 1906, when 50 Labour candidates went to the poll, and 29 were elected to Parliament, where they at once formed a separate Party, with its own officers and whips. At the last General Election, in December, 1910, 42 candidates of the Party were successful. The "Labour Members" have been, to the extent of about four-fifths, the secretaries or other salaried officials of Trade Unions, whilst the remainder have been members of Socialist societies belonging, as they are proud to claim, to the "intellectual proletariat." The great majority of the Labour Members are, however, definitely and avowedly Socialist in their opinions, and the programme of the Party, as declared at successive Party Conferences, has become one of distinctively Socialist character. This is, of course, only parallel with a corresponding evolution in the Trades Union Congress.

What has now been created is a Party organised on the double basis of national societies and constituency organisations. The Trade Unions and Socialist Societies will remain as they are, with their rights of representation and of voting power in exact proportion to numerical membership. But side by side with them in the Party Conference will sit the delegates of the various Parliamentary constituencies in which the Party has a local organisation. This is not a complete novelty, as Trades Councils and Local Labour Parties have always been admitted to affiliation, but their numbers have so far been small and their influence has not been considerable. Steps are being taken to get Local Labour Parties organised in as many British constituencies as possible. The formation of three or four hundred is looked for within the next few months.

A more important provision is the introduction, alongside the constituent bodies, of individually enrolled members. This, too, is not entirely a novelty. Energetic Local Labour Parties, like those at Barrow and Woolwich, have always admitted individual members, but usually only as associate members, sometimes only on ward committees. In view of the doubling of the electorate, and especially of the admission of 6,000,000 women, five-sixths of them married, it becomes plain that a much more direct appeal to the electors as such is indispensable for electoral success. The great majority of married women are not eligible for membership of any Trade Union. It is, too, unreasonable practically to exclude from the Party all the men who do not enter through the narrow gate of Trade Unionism or that of membership of a definitely Socialist propagandist body. Hence provision has been made, in every constituency, for a separate section of individually enrolled men, and another of individually enrolled women, who subscribe to the Party constitution and programme, and contribute a minimum of a shilling a year (for men) and sixpence a year (for women). These sections of individual members will have representatives on the local Executive Committee, at the Party Conference, and even on the National Executive. It is hoped to enrol in this way, and to enlist in the service of the Party, not only many hundreds of thousands of the new working-class electors, but also to attract many men and women of the shopkeeping, manufacturing, and professional classes who are dissatisfied with the old political parties.

A third feature is the special appeal to the 6,000,000 women electors. The Labour Party has, indeed, always been open to women on the same terms as to men, on a basis of complete equality. It is a ludicrous blunder—one into which more than one newspaper has fallen—to suppose that the Labour Party has hitherto included no women, except the members of the Women's Labour League and the relatively few women members of the three Socialist Societies. The Party has always comprised quite as large a proportion of the women Trade Unionists as of the men. The very extensive Workers' Union, with over 200,000 members, includes a very high proportion of women. The Northern Counties Weavers' Amalgamation finds two-thirds of its 200,000 membership among women; and the Amalgamated Association of Card and Blowing Room Operatives and Ringspinners reckons only one-tenth of its membership of 56,000 to be men. Out of the 2,500,000 affiliated members of the Labour Party, it is probable that something like 250,000 are women, being certainly more than half of all the organised women wage earners. It is true that, owing to the legal formalities necessary before political action can be taken by a Trade Union, the National Federation of Women Workers, the largest exclusively female Trade Union, is not yet affiliated to the Party; nor are several of the smaller Women's Unions.

The Labour Party has so far not laid itself out to make much use of women, and has never had any woman on its National Executive. Henceforth strenuous efforts will be made to enrol individual women as members of the Local Labour Parties; they will have their separate sections, and be secured representation on the local executives; and—unlike anything done by either the Liberal or the Unionist Party organisations—provision is made for there being always at least four women members of the National Executive itself.

These proposals of change have involved the solution of the difficult problem of how to get the National Executive elected by the Party Conference, so as to ensure the new elements being represented. The Conference has lately set its face against any division of the delegates into sections for voting purposes; and the Trade Unions cling to "voting by card," which ensures the supremacy of the extensive memberships of the larger Unions. Hence it is provided that the Conference should always



vote as a whole, and always "by card." But it has been decided to elect the new National Executive from three lists of candidates, thirteen from the nominees of the Trade Unions and other Societies, five from the nominees of the constituency organisations in which the individually enrolled men will find a place, and four from a list of women nominated by all the constituent bodies indiscriminately. Thus, whilst the whole National Executive will be elected by the Conference itself, voting together, the votes will be cast for candidates on three sectional lists.

More important, however, than any of these changes in the constitution is the change of spirit that has inspired them. The Labour Party, which has never been formally restricted to manual-working wage-earners, has now been publicly thrown open to all workers "by hand or by brain." Its declared object is to be, not merely the improvement of the conditions of the wage-earner, but "to secure for the producers, by hand or by brain, the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service." The only persons to be excluded (and that, of course, only by inference) are the unoccupied and unproductive recipients of rents and dividends—the so-called "idle rich"—whom it is interesting to find "The Times" editorially declaring to be of no use to the community. The Labour Party of the future, in short, is to be a Party of the producers, whether manual workers or brain workers, associated against the private owners of land and capital as such. Its policy of "common ownership" brings it, as a similar evolution brought John Stuart Mill—to use his own words in the "Autobiography"—"decidedly under the general designation of Socialist." But it is a Socialism which is no more specific than a definite repudiation of the individualism that characterised all the political parties of the past generation, and that still dominates the House of Commons. This declaration of the Labour Party leaves it open to choose from time to time whatever forms of common ownership, from the co-operative store to the nationalised railway, and whatever forms of popular administration and control of industry, from national guilds to ministries of employment and municipal management, may, in particular cases, commend themselves.

What the Labour Party at present means by its Socialism is revealed in the remarkable pamphlet which it has published on its "After the War Programme," setting forth in a dozen detailed resolutions passed at the Manchester Party Conference exactly what it wishes done with the railways, the canals, the coal mines, the banking system, the demobilisation of the army and munition workers, the necessary rehousing of the people, the measures to be taken for preventing the occurrence of unemployment, the improvement of agriculture, the taxation to be imposed to pay for the war, the reform of our educational system, and what not. A fuller and more detailed statement of the Party's policy and programme is given in "Labour and the New Social Order," an official and authoritative declaration of the Party's proposals for the reconstruction of society. The prospective candidate for Parliament, and, indeed, anyone who cares to know what the politically minded workman is really thinking, should send twopence for this pamphlet to the secretary of the Labour Party, at 1, Victoria Street, S.W. Opinions will naturally differ as to some of these sweeping proposals, but no one of any education can safely denounce them as unpracticable or despise them as ill-informed. It is, indeed, one of the claims of the Labour Party that science is on their side; that it is their proposals, not those of the Liberals or those of the Unionists, that nowadays receive the general support of the "orthodox" economists; and that, as a matter of fact, it is essentially their proposals to which every Minister of State, when he is brought up against a difficult problem

of administration, has actually to turn—and then to lose his nerve, emasculate what would have got over his difficulties, and produce an abortion which has the advantages neither of individualism nor of collectivism!

But the programme of the Labour Party is, and will probably remain, less important (except for educating the political leaders of other parties) than the spirit underlying the programme, that spirit which gives any party its soul. The Labour Party stands essentially for revolt against the inequality of circumstance that degrades and brutalises and disgraces our civilisation. It abhors and repudiates the unscientific and immoral doctrine that the competitive struggle for the means of life is, in human society, either inevitable or requisite for the survival of the fittest; it declares, indeed, in full accord with science, that competition produces degradation and death, whilst it is conscious and deliberate co-operation which is productive of life and progress. It is unreservedly democratic in its conviction—here also fortified by political science—that only by the widest possible participation in power and the most generally spread consciousness of consent can any civilised community attain either its fullest life or its utmost efficiency. But it recognises that no mere rightness of aspiration or morality of purpose can in themselves accomplish their ends; and that for the achievement of results knowledge and the application of the scientific method is required, notably in the science of society, for the further study and endowment of which it presses. And finally the Labour Party has faith in internationalism (as distinguished from the characteristically Liberal cosmopolitanism). It repudiates all "Imperialism" or desire for domination over other races. It pleads for the right of each people to live its own life, and make its own specific contribution to the world in its own way, recognising, indeed, no one "superior race," but "reciprocal superiorities" among all races. It is not without significance that the National Executive of the Labour Party has included, as a fundamental object of the Party, the establishment of a Federation or League of Nations for such international legislation as may prove possible. No other political party has yet nailed this flag to its mast.

What will be the upshot of it all? How far the Labour Party can get its new organisation effectively going, and its three or four hundred candidates actually in the field, before Mr. Lloyd George springs the general election on the country may well be doubted. In any case, a "Khaki Election," with the briefest of electoral campaigns, and as regards half the electorate at the very first time of voting, does not afford the most promising opportunity for a new Party. On the other hand, the country is "on the jump." Old habits of thought are broken up. The gigantic problems for solution make the worn-out platitudes inherited from Gladstone and Disraeli seem unsubstantial. There has been no lack of young and enthusiastic candidates of education and experience to come to the aid of the Trade Union officials in upholding the Labour Party's banner. A political landslide—especially now that the co-operators are throwing themselves into politics—is not impossible. But it is, for the Labour Party, not a matter of winning the next or any particular election. The Labour Party is, without doubt, to-day the party of inspiration and promise. To-morrow it may well prove to be the party of the future, destined, perhaps, to play as large a part in the political history of the twentieth century as the Liberal Party did in that of the nineteenth.

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