"Laborism" and Imperialism in Australia

THE newspapers are full of the exploits of the Australian troops at the front, and this self-governing dominion of the British Empire is receiving for its loyalty the full meed of praise from the oracles of Imperialism in England. All this would not be so extraordinarily significant to the Socialist movement—no more significant than the attitude of Canada, for instance—were it not for the circumstance that the Labor Party controls the government of Australia, and has been in power for many years.

Australia is sending contingent after contingent of troops to "fight for liberty" in Europe; and one of the earliest of these contingents is being used to "fight for liberty" by maintaining British rule in Egypt. With but half the population, Australia is providing nearly as many troops as Canada. The militarist, imperialist, and protectionist interests are in the ascendant; and the Sydney *Bulletin* expresses Australian aspirations thus: "Having put in the field an army as big as the whole Empire accomplished up to twenty years ago, the Commonwealth may well have a right to a say in the peace terms *and in the sharing of the plunder.*"

The officials of the Labor Party in power, and with almost complete control of the federal and local government, have given their heartiest support and encouragement to recruiting and British Imperialism. They have, in this respect, proven much more zealous than the ordinary bourgeois government of Canada.

The Australian Labor Government recently sent over its Labor Prime Minister to England to represent its interests and as another pledge of loyalty to the Empire. The utterances of "Labor Premier" William Morris Hughes, who started his career as a particularly "revolutionary" labor leader, have met with delighted applause from the imperialistic British press, which is featuring his utterances on "organizing the Empire." Mr. Hughes was active in the Paris Trade Conference of the Allies, which met to determine ways and means of an economic war against Germany after the military war is over. He expressed himself as favoring: "A joint tariff system which will establish minimum rates among the Allies and their colonies, reasonable rates for neutrals, and strong discrimination against all dealings with hostile countries." A federated Empire, with a centralized war department, aggressive militarism and imperialism, are other "British aims" formulated by Mr. Hughes.

This newer nationalism and Imperialism of the Australian "Labor" Prime Minister meets with the disapproval of even ordinary bourgeois radicals in England. It remained for a man who waged his electoral campaigns on the issue of the class struggle against capitalism, to bestow his approval upon the most reactionary forces of this very Capitalism.

There was, even prior to the war, an audible discontent among the workers against the Labor Party, expressed particularly by the unskilled whose strikes were ruthlessly suppressed by the "Labor" government. Today, the leading Labor papers in Australia repudiate Mr. Hughes' attitude, although not going far enough in opposition to the Labor-imperialist regime; and only recently the government lost every by-election.

What is the meaning of this Labor-Imperialist alliance?

The *Socialist Review*, organ of the British Independent Labor Party, in its April-June issue, sighs over its shattered great expectations; it formerly hailed the triumphs of the Australian Labor Party and its bold legislative projects as "the example" that "would stimulate the advance of social-democracy throughout the world," but now recants:

"Australia, notwithstanding the headlong pace of her Labor victories, is not, we fear, so much nearer in heart to Socialism than the Mother Country and the older States. There, as in our own country, now that the Labor Party in Parliament has spent its first breath, we find the majority of the members drifting into all the old accustomed ways of bourgeois politicians."

It would appear, however, that the responsibility for the mistaken impression lies not with the Labor Party, but with the diagnosis and optimism of the *Socialist Review*. Socialists—*real* Socialists—never expected anything particularly revolutionary from the Labor Party.

But is there any real difference between Australian Laborism and English Laborism? Superficially, yes; actually, no. The apparent differences flow from the circumstance that Laborism is in power in Australia, and is a negligible governmental force in England. Laborism, whether in Australia or in England, starts from the same premise: working within the bounds of the national organization, and maintaining the unity of the Empire. It may be remembered that Keir Hardie repudiated granting independence to India. At the Glasgow Trade Union Congress, some of the delegates protested against allowing Mr. Hughes to speak; but when he did speak, the following statement was greeted with tumultuous applause: "There is no great achievement that stands to the credit of trade unionism here or in Australia but will crumble to its fall if the issue of the war is decided against us."

Socialism, Laborism and Syndicalism, in spite of their great theoretical and emotional divergencies, broke down in the great crisis from a similar cause —Nationalism. Work within the nation exclusively, fight shy of the fundamental industrial and inter-

national organization of the working class, and collapse is inevitable when the test comes—as much in peace as in war.

But in the case of Laborism there are aggravated features. Socialism and Syndicalism avowedly seek the overthrow of the capitalist state, while Laborism seeks merely to become a part of the governing system of the state. Having become a part of the governing system, as in Australia, Laborism necessarily pursues a nationalist, an imperialist policy. This is the fact of prime importance; other facts are incidental, and but one requires particularizing. Trade union officials, as a class, are petty bourgeois in character and outlook. They are conservative, reactionary, an official caste acting as a drag upon the progress of the labor movement. This is particularly true in the English-speaking countries and in Germany.

But in Australia, as in the other belligerent countries, reaction is producing revolt. The Labor Party has repudiated the excesses of its Prime Minister, and the revolutionary portion of the working class is recognizing the futility and insufficiency of Laborism. This iconoclastic war has smashed another idol with feet of clay.—*L. C. F.*