

NOTES OF THE MONTH

Reformism in Disintegration—Advance to Communism!—I.L.P. History—The Poison at the Root—Rejection of Marxism—The Real Guilt for Labourism—“Certain Results Were Inevitable” —Rejection of Communism, 1921—I.L.P. and Labour Party —“A Hopeless Task”—Living Wage Illusions—Communist Criticism—Who Was Right?—No Self Criticism—“Crisis-Revolutionism”—Yielding to Pressure—Oppportunists Still—Leaders From Behind—Leading the Left to Strangle It—“Fundamental Conflict” or “Technicalities”?—The “New” “Revolutionary” Programme—“Definitely Marxist”—What is Marxism?—The State and Bourgeois Democracy—I.L.P. Parliamentary Ministerialism —Marxism and Revolution—I.L.P. Pacifist Trade Unionism—“Parliamentary Democracy, plus If”—Identity with Old I.L.P.-Labour Programme — Future Reunion? — To Left I.L.P.-ers.

STAGE by stage, the old forms of the British working-class movement are changing, and new forms are developing. The Bradford Conference decision last month of the Independent Labour Party, the original reformist socialist party in Britain and the main founder of the Labour Party, to make a formal break with the Labour Party and adopt a professedly “revolutionary” “Marxist” programme, is a sign of the times. For forty years the Independent Labour Party has fought Marxism, has fought revolutionary socialism, has preached its own opportunist line as the only correct line in Britain, and has proclaimed the path of the Labour Party and of the Labour majority in Parliament as the only path to socialism. To-day, where are all these theories? The merciless compulsion of hard facts, drumming dialectics into even the thickest skulls, has smashed this line, and compelled a drastic change of front. To-day the present Independent

Labour Party breaks with the Labour Party, denounces the Labour Party, denounces reformism and reformist parliamentarism, and proclaims allegiance to Marxism, to revolutionary socialism. We are not concerned for a moment to exaggerate the value of the new professions and programme, which we shall have occasion to examine in some detail, and will find in the end to be remarkably like the old line in a new dress to meet new conditions. Nor would we wish to exaggerate the present importance of the Independent Labour Party, which has for some time been playing a diminishing rôle, and has shrunk from its former numbers to a membership of under twelve thousand (according to the Secretary, Paton, writing in *Forward* for August 13, the votes at Bradford, which numbered 389, represented 3.3 per cent. of the paid-up membership; this would give a membership of 11,750); and though it may have a temporary new blossoming on the basis of the new programme, it is manifestly destined to shrink still further between the Labour Party on the one hand and Communism on the other. But the Independent Labour Party has long been a factor in the British working-class movement; and the collapse of this old pillar of the reformist prison-house under the combined pressure of the capitalist crisis and of working-class discontent, and still more, the attempt to patch up and hide the collapse under cover of new "revolutionary" trappings, is a big sign of where the forces of the working class are moving. It is a further stage in the disintegration of reformism, which already characterised the crisis of 1931, with the heavy exposure of the Labour Party, and the first big fall of the Labour vote. *The breaking off of the I.L.P. from the Labour Party, and its proclamation of a "revolutionary" programme is the second step in this process of the disintegration of reformism.*

IT is a process which we who are revolutionary Marxists can welcome with understanding and with confidence. Thousands of young workers, themselves only the advance-guard of a future army, waves upon waves of new advance, are pressing forward, are compelling their leaders to mouth

unfamiliar formulas, are rallying to the slogans of the independent political fight against capitalism and the Labour Party (remember how tiny was our minority when we first raised this cry nearly five years ago), to the slogans of revolutionary struggle, of mass struggle, of Marxism. *We are absolutely confident that all the best of these will come to Communism*, that a very great strengthening of the forces of Communism will be the final outcome. Of course there are dangers. We have no illusions about the leadership who repeat these slogans; they are pastmasters of manœuvre and deception, "old parliamentary hands," soaked in cynicism, scepticism and passivity, without an atom of revolutionary sincerity or serious political principle. The formulations and programmes in which these slogans are embodied are deliberately vague, confused and ambiguous, and framed, not to point the way and give clearness, but only to mislead; and their authors evade to the last any attempt to explain their meaning in definite, concrete terms. There is every danger, and every intention on the part of the chiefs of the manœuvre, to make what should be a transition into a stopping place, into an actual point of reaction. *But we can conquer these dangers.* All the cards are in our hands. If the Liberal-Christian nonsense which used to be the mainstay of I.L.P. propaganda is now disowned and in full rout, how much more easily shall we not deal with counterfeit "Marxism," against which we can bring the whole arsenal of Marxist argument at once into play to expose it in its true colours and compel the real Marxist conclusions. All the cards are in our hands. For the mass of the workers who follow these leaders are not insincere; when they respond with enthusiasm to the call for revolution, for mass-struggle, for workers' power, for the extra-parliamentary fight for socialism, they are affirming a serious wish and determination, even though they may not yet have thought very clearly about what this fight involves. And it is precisely here that we can help them, along the path of hard, comradely, ideological controversy, at the same time as we fight side by side in the immediate fight against capitalism. We regard these workers as our allies who are marching to join us, as

future fellow-members in a single party. Having said this, let us get down to the battle, to the ideological battle that we must have out with them, in order to reach this future unity.

LET us begin, not with the immediate present controversies, but with a little survey of the line of development that has led to these issues. The Independent Labour Party was originally formed, so we read in all the conventional histories, in reaction against the doctrinaire Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation, which had proved itself wholly unsuitable to the British temperament; the new party was an attempt to evolve a more elastic socialism, free from doctrines, suited to the British temperament, and to build upon the existing working-class organisations, the trade unions, in order to reach a political working-class party. So far the conventional histories; and since they were all written before the present crisis, they end with a little note of triumph on the final discovery of the correct road for Britain, and the final disproof of Marxism as unsuitable for Britain. Recent developments may, however, make some a little more uncertain about this official complacency, and a little more ready to reconsider in the light of present knowledge these origins and the line of development that has led to the present outcome. For in fact the conventional histories, which are all written from the standpoint of a prosperous Labour Member of Parliament, are far from adequate; and the true history of the British working-class movement has still to be written.

THE formation of the Independent Labour Party contained in fact two elements, one most fruitful, and the other most poisonous; and the poison unfortunately had power to kill the fruit. The fruitful element was the attempt to reach a wider mass basis, to build on the organised workers, to seek to draw the trade unions into political activity. So far from this element being in contradiction to Marxism, Engels had in fact in 1887 already outlined such a conception as the probably necessary line of advance in Britain—six years before the formation of the

Independent Labour Party. Unfortunately, the only existing socialist organisation in England, the Social Democratic Federation, which was supposed to be Marxist (a myth that an examination of its programme would soon dispel, and indeed its leadership had been explicitly repudiated by both Marx and Engels), was so far from understanding Marxism, as to be wholly incapable of fulfilling this task or realising the rôle of leadership in the development of the working-class movement. The lead, therefore, inevitably passed to non-Marxism, to liberal-socialist opportunism, to Fabianism, that is, to the most commonplace imitation of existing bourgeois thought, without horizon, without perspective, without any deeper understanding of any kind, which saw in the British Constitution and His Majesty's Civil Service the grand total of all social-political theory. This was the other element in the formation of the Independent Labour Party, the poison of opportunism, the so-called "freedom from theory," meaning in fact "freedom" from Marxism and complete servility to bourgeois theory. The poison killed the fruit; the trade unions, so far from being drawn from their servility to capitalism into the revolutionary fight against it, were only drawn from one form of servility to capitalism, *i.e.*, Liberalism, into what became another form of servility to capitalism, *i.e.*, Labourism. The servility was never broken; for only the sword of Marxism can cut that servility.

THE I.L.P. from the outset cut itself loose from Marxism, that is, from the common basis, from the theory and practice, of international socialism. Says George Benson in the official I.L.P.-issued "History of English Socialism":

The I.L.P. has never accepted the economic (*sic*) system of Marx. It would be incorrect to say that it has rejected Marxism. It has rather ignored it. Marx's *Kapital* is quite unreadable to any save the serious and determined student, and as the literature and periodicals of the party have been mainly written by such non-Marxian socialists as MacDonald, Snowden, Glasier and Hardie, Marx's system is practically unknown in the English socialist movement. The economic teaching of the I.L.P. is largely that of the

Fabian Society, and the "class-consciousness" of Labour is deeply modified by what MacDonald has called "community-consciousness." (George Benson: "A History of English Socialism," p. 121, published by the "New Leader Ltd." 1925).

Or, as the official spokesman and main author of the whole line of I.L.P. theory from the outset, MacDonald, has declared in his "Story of the I.L.P.":

The I.L.P. has never belonged to any hard dogmatic school like Marxism, with hard explanations, *e.g.*, class-war, economic determinism, &c.

(J. R. MacDonald: "The Story of the I.L.P. and What It Stands For."—I.L.P. Information Committee, 1924).

In place of this, it has always maintained its famous "freedom" and "tolerance." As the same writer has continued in the same publication:

The I.L.P. has always had a tolerance even when that meant contradictory doctrines within itself and a confused appeal and propaganda.

Such "confusion"—seldom so openly admitted—is the essential basis for all opportunism and deception of the working class, which invariably defends itself by speaking of its freedom from the "rigidity" of Marxist socialism (is it the voice of MacDonald speaking of Marxism, or of Brockway speaking of Communism? It is difficult to distinguish the two).

TO-DAY the outcome is visible in all its ugly working out, to the last inch of shame and demoralisation of the movement and servitude to capitalism. The Labour Party, which was to have been the instrument of working-class emancipation, becomes to-day the main instrument for the enslavement of the working class. This is no tragic accident, no trick of fate, but the inevitable, foresee-able, predictable outcome of the original opportunist basis, not merely of the Labour Party—the original character of the Labour Party was so loose and undeveloped, that a strong Marxist leadership guiding it from the start might yet have transformed it step by step—but above all of the Independent Labour Party, of the non-Marxist opportunist theory of the Independent Labour Party, of MacDonaldism and Snowdenism,

which was the spiritual father of the Labour Party, its leader, guide and moulder to its present condition. *There, in the I.L.P., is the real guilt for the present situation of the Labour Party.* It was the I.L.P. and the I.L.P. leadership that made the theory of the Labour Party, that moulded and intensified its undemocratic constitution, that taught it the line of Liberal-Labour co-operation and co-operation with capitalism, that dominated the first Labour Government of betrayal of the working class, that expelled the Communists (the whole I.L.P. delegation at the successive Labour Party Conferences voted for the expulsion of the Communists, and for every measure of discipline against the militant workers), that set up the network of discipline to paralyse all working-class expression. And if to-day the I.L.P. is cut by a sword of its own sharpening, that is the suitable final reward of every gangster's gunman after his service is done.

FROM the outset, the voice of criticism was not absent, as to where the line chosen would inevitably lead. The voice of working-class discontent sounded again and again in the I.L.P. ranks, the fire of revolt flared up over episode after episode, and often reached high votes in successive conferences. But the I.L.P. leaders impatiently brushed aside all criticism as the voice of political illiteracy, of the "easie-oosie asses," of ignorant purism which could not understand the mass-tactic of development through the Labour Party.

A section thought that association with the Labour Party was fatally compromising, but the I.L.P. leaders knew that once things were set going certain results were inevitable. They trusted to time and their own work and influence.

(J. R. MacDonald: "The Story of the I.L.P." 1924).

This sentence deserves to stand as a monument of I.L.P. statesmanship, of that bottomless unfathomable depth of vague complacent ambiguity which characterises every I.L.P. utterance—also to-day. "The I.L.P. leaders knew that once things were set going, certain results were inevitable." True. Most true. "Certain results were inevitable." What results,

unstated. But to-day we can see them. MacDonald and Snowden as the figureheads of a Conservative Ministry ; the principal Chairmen of the I.L.P., from the beginning to 1924, MacDonald, Snowden, Allen, joined up with all the City lords, militarists, imperialists, with all the money-grubbers, usurers and sweaters, to drive down the workers to lower depths than even when the I.L.P. was started. That is the outcome of I.L.P. policy, of I.L.P. "freedom from theory," of I.L.P. leadership, as demonstrated in action by its own principal leaders. These are no casual renegades, offscourings from the fringes of a party. They are the principal leaders, the authors and expounders of the whole I.L.P. philosophy, and their line can be traced as a continuous line from the beginning to the present day. "Certain results were inevitable." (In the light of present facts, would not a little more "rigidity" have been of value, Brother Brockway ?)

SINCE the war, the I.L.P. has been faced with increasing crisis, both from within its own ranks, from the development of the Labour Party, and from the development of the world crisis and of the world revolution. On the one hand, the challenge of the workers' revolution, successful in Russia, close to success in Germany and Central Europe, swept through the ranks of the workers in the I.L.P., and was only with difficulty defeated by the I.L.P. leaders, at the cost of a manœuvre of a temporary secession from the Second International. But the I.L.P. leaders, MacDonald, Snowden, Allen, and the rest, fully supported by the then lesser leaders, Maxton, Brockway, &c., succeeded in damming the revolutionary wave and defeating affiliation to the Communist International. The resolution of the 1921 Conference declared :

That the twenty-one conditions imposed by Moscow cannot be accepted ; the Conference rejects the idea that this country must follow Moscow methods, and opposes itself to the policy which is deliberately designed to create such conditions here ; and therefore calls upon all workers and socialists to renew their activities as socialist propagandists, to strengthen the Independent Labour Party, to capture the machinery of Government, both local and

national, and thus inaugurate a policy which will transform the broken and bankrupt society of capitalism into socialism.

(Report of 1921 Conference of the I.L.P.)

That was eleven years ago. What has the experience of these eleven years taught? After eleven years the Russian workers, under the leadership of the Communist Party and along Communist methods, have achieved such gigantic advance to socialism, that these results have now become the regular mainstay of all I.L.P. propaganda as the demonstration of the triumph of socialism (but always as a propaganda of the unexplained results, of a Utopia, never as a propaganda of the "How?"—the one supremely important question to the British workers). But what of the I.L.P.'s alternative path during these eleven years, through the "capture of the machinery of government, both local and national" to "transform the broken and bankrupt society of capitalism into socialism." The workers have voted, have voted into office two Labour Governments. Not one step of advance has been achieved. On the contrary, the workers are worse off than at the start. And to-day the I.L.P. leadership come forward with exactly the same arguments as in 1921 to reject the methods of the revolutionary working-class struggle, by the deceitful trick of calling these methods, laid down since the Communist Manifesto eighty-five years ago, "Moscow methods," "Russian methods"—the stalest, lying trick of all social opportunism since the war. "No Moscow Methods" said MacDonald and Snowden in 1921—and we have seen the outcome to-day. "No Moscow Methods" say Maxton and Brockway to-day. The identity is sufficiently ominous.

AT the same time, the very growth and advance of the Labour Party have intensified the difficulties of the I.L.P. on an ever greater scale. On the one hand, it had rejected the revolutionary line. On the other, it did not wish to disappear into the Labour Party. How to satisfy the growing discontent of the militant workers, and yet not break with the Labour Party? How to differentiate itself from the Labour Party, and yet keep clear of the revolutionary line?

Labourism or Communism ; what could there be between ?—this is the dilemma on the horns of which the I.L.P. has writhed for the past dozen years, with ever greater contortions as the Labour Party has grown in strength and discipline on the one side, and the discontent of the workers on the other. At the first the I.L.P. leadership was inclined to consider there could be no answer to this dilemma. Thus the N.A.C. (National Administrative Council, or Executive of the I.L.P.) reported in December, 1920 :

We think it a mistake to try and justify the continued existence of the I.L.P. by changing its programme so as to make it different from that of the Labour Party. Obviously that is a hopeless task.

(“ The N.A.C. to the Branches,” December, 1920).

“ *A hopeless task.*” *That was the opinion of the I.L.P. in 1920, that it was a “ hopeless task ” to try to differentiate its programme from that of the Labour Party.* Let us note this well (the report is signed among others by Jowett, Wallhead, Neil Maclean—Maxton and Brockway were not yet on the N.A.C.), when the I.L.P. endeavours to claim to have represented always something different from the Labour Party, and to shelve its responsibility. And then let us pass on to see how the I.L.P. spent the next dozen years, these so critical years in working-class history and so urgently needing strong and clear leadership, with desperate attempts to fool the workers into believing that it was accomplishing this “ hopeless task,” that it was squaring the circle.

FOR it was to this “ hopeless task ” that the I.L.P. in fact set itself during the next dozen years. At the same time as the report of the N.A.C. above quoted, a “ Committee on Policy and Relations with Labour Party ” had been sitting, and for the first time outlined the manœuvre which was to become the official policy. Its Report declared :

The Committee feels that in so far as the programme of the I.L.P. is identical with that of the Labour Party, new adherents to the Socialist movement are more likely to join the Labour Party. . . . On the other hand, if their views are more advanced than the Labour Party’s programme, they will join an organisation with a more definitely advanced programme than the I.L.P. has so far put forward. . . .

The revision of the Party's programme which has been recommended by the Committee should meet many of these difficulties, and tend to consolidate and develop the Party.

("Report on Policy and Relations with the Labour Party," December, 1920).

Here we have the whole manœuvre set out, plump and plain. The Labour Party and the I.L.P. are to set up business as Codlin and Short. The I.L.P. is to "revise" its programme, and produce a "more advanced" programme than the Labour Party. By this little device, those whose "views are more advanced than the Labour Party's programme," and who might be in danger of "joining an organisation with a more definitely advanced programme than the I.L.P. has so far put forward" (*i.e.*, the Communist Party), will be secured instead to join the I.L.P. in place of the Labour Party; all tastes will thus be catered for, and the profits will all come in the end to the same old firm. This monument of political cynicism was signed, among others, by J. S. Middleton, Assistant Secretary of the Labour Party, Philip Snowden, Bramley, Cole, Mrs. Hamilton, and other lights of the Labour Party. *Thus there was at the outset no question of a conflict*; it was a business arrangement, a contract for the division of business signed on both sides. If finally the calculations went wrong, it was no fault of the promoters, but because the uncontrollable outside factor, the mounting discontent of the workers, tore through the transparent make-believe, and compelled the unhappy I.L.P. leadership, after long resistance and reluctance, to enter on a new and more desperate stage of manœuvre.

THE typical expression of this stage of the manœuvre, from within the Labour Party, was the "Living Wage" or so-called "Socialism In Our Time" policy. Let it be noted once again that this policy was first adumbrated by the representative of the extreme right, Clifford Allen, in his Chairman's Address of 1924. It was elaborated in an official report of four representatives, all of whom have ranged themselves with the right—Brailsford, Wise, Hobson and Creech Jones. Yet this policy, which was the main substance of

I.L.P. propaganda during the years 1925-1930, was actually proclaimed and propagated by the sentimentalist rhetoricians, the Maxtons and Brockways (themselves incapable of producing any policy) as the great "left" contribution to socialist thought and tactics. The actual policy, as is by now sufficiently familiar, was a farrago of nonsense: ignoring blandly every serious issue of the real situation, of capitalist policy, of the Labour Party, of the conditions of the working-class struggle or of the conquest of power, it sketched out a muddle-headed mixture of every capitalist and reformist nostrum, credit policy, rationalisation, solution of the crisis through the home market, Fordism, organised capitalism, American prosperity and high wages as the disproof of Marxism and model for socialism, the triumph of the Federal Reserve Board in "ironing out the trade cycle," &c., &c. Many of the passages from this report and the accompanying propaganda could be reprinted now with comic effect as examples of I.L.P. leadership to the workers and a measure of their understanding of the situation.

IT is still important to recall this now moribund, but not quite dead, "Living Wage" (alias "Socialism In Our Time") policy, because the present I.L.P. endeavours to-day to put as its distinctive claim against Communism that it understands better the British situation. *The policy and propaganda of the I.L.P. during the past decade is damning evidence against this claim, and a powerful evidence of the greater correctness in every point of the analysis of the Communist International.* Indeed the whole "Living Wage" and "Socialism In Our Time" policy was at the time subjected to very close analysis by the Communist Party, an analysis to which no serious answer was attempted at the time, and of which it is now pertinent to remind the I.L.P. leadership in the light of subsequent events. The Communist analysis argued that the whole I.L.P. policy and propaganda, with its easy assumptions of solution of the crisis through legislative measures of cheap credit, capitalist reorganisation, a minimum wage, increased social services, &c., completely failed to

understand the real character, extent and deeper causes of the crisis of capitalism in Britain, which would inevitably extend and lead to very much heavier attacks against the workers ; that the American " miracle " of supposed stable prosperity, universal " high wages," " solution " of poverty and the trade cycle, &c., was nothing but a bourgeois economists' myth, and the temporarily ascending conditions of capitalism there would give place to extremely heavy crisis also in America in the near future ; that rationalisation would rapidly lead to intensified world crisis ; and that the prospect before the workers was not one of peaceful advance to socialism through rising prosperity, higher wages, and increased social services, but of ever intensified struggle against worsened conditions and extending capitalist attacks, raising ever more sharply the issue of class power. The I.L.P. in reply rejected these criticisms as based on the " obsolete " doctrines of Marx, who knew only nineteenth century capitalism, and whose theories were now finally disproved by the triumphs of modern organised capitalism in America.

TO-DAY every worker can judge who was right, the Communist Party or the Independent Labour Party, in this whole test issue. Indeed, the question can be widened to the whole general question of which has given the more correct analysis of the situation and more correct leadership to the workers during the past decade, not only in these questions, but in all questions, including the transformation and development of the Labour Party, the necessity of the independent fight against the Labour Party, the world situation and war, the transformation of the trade unions and new conditions of economic struggles, &c. It would certainly be of interest if the I.L.P. leadership could to-day be compelled to state where they stand now in relation to the Communist criticisms of their policy and analysis of the situation five years ago, which they then rejected. These same criticisms and lines of argument they are to-day, five years late, *after the event*, after the harm is done by their wrong leadership,

beginning to repeat in a very confused form in all their propaganda. But to demand such honesty and self-criticism of them would be in fact to demand too much. Self-criticism belongs only to responsible leadership. *The absence of any serious attempt at self-criticism in relation to their own past and professed present "change of front" is the most damning fact about the whole present I.L.P. position and leadership.* From this fact alone it is possible to say that no serious self-correction and rearming has taken place, but only a cheapjack's hasty change of goods in the shop-window. The workers in the I.L.P. who wish to make a real change must carry through such a real drastic review of the whole line and reconsideration of every issue for themselves. If they once do that, and refuse to swallow a few easy phrases at face value, there will be no doubt of the result.

INDEED, the I.L.P. leadership have already begun to show their hand by endeavouring to cover the glaring contradiction that their present change of front, in relation to their uncorrected past, lays bare, with the declaration (Chairman's Address to the Annual Conference, 1932) that the Living Wage policy, which "was appropriate five years ago" now "becomes inadequate." By this halting declaration they only expose the true character of their present position. Since when has this policy of reformism "become inadequate"? If it is "inadequate" now, why was it "appropriate" five years ago? Have the basic conditions of capitalism and the working-class conquest of power so completely changed between 1927 and 1932? *Was Reformism correct in 1927, and has it only "become" incorrect in 1932?* When we are told with such a flourish of trumpets to-day "First, Workers' Power—then a Socialist Plan" as now the only correct order, was this not equally necessary in 1927? In effect, their declaration amounts to saying, in the very same breath that they declare themselves "revolutionaries," that of course five years ago, before this terrible world crisis came and destroyed all our hopes and plans, a policy of reforms, of "a series of measures over a period of years" within capitalism, was

perfectly correct. *And they do not see that when they say this, they are simply proving that they are still fully reformists in their outlook, and directly denying all their "revolutionary" professions.*

IT is in fact only the pressure of the present world-crisis, and not any basic change from reformism, that has compelled the present temporary apparent change of front of the I.L.P. *It is a species of "crisis-socialism" or "crisis-revolutionism," as if the necessity of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism depends, not on the permanent conditions of capitalism and the working-class struggle, but only on the special temporary conditions of the present world-crisis.* It is obvious that this type of "revolutionism," as a political basis for a workers' party, is nothing but another form of opportunist floating on the surface of events, without plan or compass, and will rapidly ebb, if capitalism shows a slight upward turn. The complete confusion, and failure to understand either the present crisis or the revolutionary line, is shown in the fantastic loose talk now indulged in by the I.L.P. about the present crisis as the "final collapse of capitalism" ("There is no end but complete catastrophe"—Maxton in the *New Leader*, September 4, 1931; "We confess we see no prospect of escape"—Paton in the *New Leader*, July 24, 1931), as if such collapse were some automatic question, and not solely dependent on whether the revolutionary workers are able to overthrow it. From this it follows that, if capitalism should show some upward turn, all their theories fall to the ground. In that case we may expect that, after a period of some confusion (which they will try to hide by ridiculing the Communists as having been under the illusion that capitalism was about to collapse and a revolution was imminent), they will re-emerge as ordinary reformists until the next crash.

THIS temporary, superficial "bowing-to-the-storm" character of the I.L.P.'s present "revolutionism" can be expressed still more sharply. It is not even a simple question of pressure of the world-crisis as the cause in the

sense that the world-crisis has suddenly awakened a set of sleepers and caused them to see the error of their ways. This might at least provide a genuine conversion, even though late, and very damning to any claim to leadership. But the actual process has been far more profoundly and degradingly opportunist. Not the pressure of the world-crisis as an explosive exposure of the bankruptcy of all their conceptions, but solely *the pressure of the growing working-class discontent* and militancy in the ranks of their own membership consequent on the world-crisis, has driven the I.L.P. leadership, after prolonged resistance, to a temporary *apparent* change of front—without self-criticism, without self-correction, without any facing of basic issues. That every step to the “left” during these last years—the imposition of discipline on the parliamentary group, the move for disaffiliation, the change of programme—has begun as a pressure from below, has been extorted against reluctant opposition from above, has only been finally taken up above in order to maintain their leadership, in order not to lose hold on the dwindling membership—this can be easily proved by a survey of the facts.

WITH naïve candour the General Secretary, Paton, stated the position at the Annual Conference in 1932 :

The reality of the present position was that for years now they had been suffering a constant attrition of members and branches which nothing they had been able to do had the power to check. . . .

When he had come to Head Office in 1924, he had found the N.A.C. with a constant preoccupation—the need for evolving a fighting policy distinct from that of the Labour Party, if the I.L.P. was to survive. (1932 Annual Conference Report, p. 43).

Thus the question was never a question of the correctness of a “right” or “left” policy, of endeavouring to find the correct necessary lead for the working class, popular or unpopular, and fighting for it; the question was solely how to find a left-seeming policy *in order to check the dwindling membership*. The “constant preoccupation” of Head Office since 1924, we learn, was how to “evolve a fighting policy distinct from that

of the Labour Party," not because such a fighting policy was necessary from the facts of the situation and the working-class struggle, but in order to maintain a hold on the membership, "if the I.L.P. was to survive." Similarly the right wing leader, Dollan, writes of the falling membership :

The membership of the I.L.P. is at its lowest since the war. The membership has declined at least by several thousand in the last five years. The "old gang" were blamed for the fall in membership, before Maxton became leader. He has been the leader for six years, during which the membership has continued to fall. The exact facts of membership and finance are known by me, but I refrain from making them public because publication would harm the party. (*New Leader*, July 22, 1932.)

The essential available facts of the membership are not so difficult to reach. According to the Report of the Policy Committee in 1920, the membership, based on affiliation fees paid at Head Office, stood in 1909 at 28,000; in 1914, after the effects of Liberal-Labour co-operation, it had fallen to 20,000; in 1919, with the post-war wave, it rose to 32,000 and in 1920 to 37,000. To-day, as we have seen (Paton's statement in *Forward*, August 13, 1932, revealing the 389 votes at Bradford as equivalent to 3.3 per cent. of the paid-up membership), it has fallen to under 12,000.

THE history of the past few years shows a continuous pressure of discontent from below, and reluctant yielding from above. The speeches of Maxton and the leadership during these years are a constant plea against their own supporters ("You placed me against the guns," &c.), a plea for "tolerance" and "latitude" in carrying out decisions, for "discretion," &c. It was the 1929 Conference that on a local resolution (moved by Southall, of Birmingham) gave a definite instruction for all I.L.P. Members of Parliament to vote against war-credits; the N.A.C., through the mouth of Maxton, pleaded for "tolerance" and "discretion" in carrying out this "difficult" decision—and proceeded not to carry it out. It was the 1930 Conference that thereupon, again on a local resolution, demanded the reconstruction of the parliamentary group on a disciplined basis; the N.A.C. proceeded

to its task with the most apologetic explanations (the Secretary Paton's correspondence with Shinwell) that it had no stomach for any form of "heresy-hunting," and that only the Conference's resolution compelled it to do anything. Finally the demand for disaffiliation arose originally from below, and showed itself as a rising force in the Divisional Conferences in the beginning of 1931. At this time, after twenty months of the Labour Government, when the disaffiliation issue was directly raised, keenly debated and voted on at the Scottish Divisional Conference, Maxton at this conference declared his "complete neutrality" on this issue. Truly, a wonderful picture of "leaders from behind"!

IT was only as through the events of 1931 the tide of disaffiliation began visibly to rise on all sides, that the N.A.C. began to hesitate. But still they clung to the last by all possible means to the Labour Party. Even after the overwhelming exposure of the August crisis and the fall of the Labour Government, they still gave their election lead for a Third Labour Government, found the Labour Election Programme "the rallying ground for the whole of the working class," and declared that this Labour Election Programme "reads almost like the published statements of the I.L.P." (*New Leader*, October 2, 1931). On the other hand, the mass of the membership were in rising revolt against further connection with the Labour Party. The Special Conference on disaffiliation was due to be held at Leeds in November. At the last moment the N.A.C. postponed it, because, as we learn from Kirkwood, a member of the N.A.C., they feared a majority for disaffiliation:

We have never taken a definite vote on this issue, but there is no denying the fact that the N.A.C. decided to call a Special Conference at Leeds on the subject of disaffiliation, and decided later, having taken cognisance of everything it could get, that *it would be better not to hold the Conference, because if it were held, the rank and file would have demanded disaffiliation.* The N.A.C. thought this would be unwise.

(Kirkwood in *Forward*, January 30, 1932.)

At the Easter Conference this year the official policy still played for time, and succeeded to split the disaffiliationist majority by the transparent manœuvre of "conditional affiliation." Only when it finally became clear that further resistance was impossible, and would have meant the danger of a real revolt and displacement of the leadership, only then took place the sudden conversion of the main body of the N.A.C. to disaffiliation (signalled already before by the very sudden conversion and complete change-over of the Secretary, Paton). The N.A.C. then took the direct leadership in disaffiliation and the new "revolutionary" policy, in order to maintain the leadership in its hands, and strangle and paralyse the real character of the movement as a movement of working-class revolt from reaching to any serious conclusion. *The process is exactly similar to that of a trade union bureaucracy, which, after resisting a strike to the last, suddenly takes on its leadership in order to strangle it from within.* And that is why the left workers in the I.L.P., if they are not to be defeated, must carry the fight a stage further to its conclusion, to real revolutionary working-class politics, to Communism.

THIS insincere, manœuvring character is most clearly shown in the nature and conditions of the break with the Labour Party. On the one hand, the I.L.P. leadership loudly proclaim that the real issue is their fight against the "betrayal" of the working class by the Labour Party :

The present difficulties arose from the opposition of the I.L.P. to the compromising policy of the Labour Government and its betrayal of working-class interests and the socialist cause.

(I.L.P. Statement signed by Maxton and Brockway, *New Leader*, July 1, 1932.)

But in the very same issue, on the very same page, we learn from the General Secretary, that "peace" with this party of "betrayal" would have been perfectly possible, if only certain "technicalities" could have been surmounted :

Had the will to peace existed in the Executive of the Labour Party, the technicalities could have been surmounted.

(I.L.P. Secretary, Paton, in the *New Leader*, July 1, 1932.)

Thus the Labour Party has "betrayed" the workers. Nevertheless, "peace" with it would be perfectly possible, if only the Labour Party itself would have shown a "will to peace" (the I.L.P. in a most Christian forgiving spirit was fully willing to make "peace" with the "traitors"); only "technicalities" stood in the way, because there was no "will to peace" of the Labour Party. What a magnificent militant leadership to the workers for opening the battle against Labour Party "betrayal"! But indeed the most damning fact about the whole "fundamental conflict" is the I.L.P.'s own proposals, as submitted to the Labour Party, for settling the "technicalities." The I.L.P. proposed that its Members of Parliament should be *bound by Labour Party Conference decisions!* As every one knows, this means the full policy of the social fascist bureaucracy, approval of the Labour Government and of every betrayal, and approval of the Standing Orders into the bargain. And lest the I.L.P. should argue that they were only ready to accept all this in the hope of "changing the policy from within," it is opportune to remind them of the fully correct statement of their Chairman in his Address to the Bradford Conference last month that "the Labour Party is not a party of individual members who have democratic power to change its leadership and policy." Thus the character of the break completely damns the claim of the I.L.P. leadership to be in any fundamental conflict with the Labour Party programme and policy.

LET us now turn to the "new revolutionary programme." It is clear from the survey of all the events which have led up to it, that the workers will have to scrutinise this production with some considerable sharpness, rather than accept it at the face value as an expression of their aims. If they have been deceived before, if the I.L.P. lead has been proved wrong every time so far, with regard to the achievement of Socialism through the Labour Party, with regard to the rejection of Marxism, with regard to the Living Wage, &c., &c., what reason is there to suppose that this "brand-new article" from the same firm is going to be any better—more

especially, when it is not accompanied with any serious examination or review of the previous policies and errors? A programme is not a collection of phrases for a peroration. A programme needs to mark out with absolute clearness the line of the working-class struggle, and to answer with absolute clearness all the basic questions and problems of the working-class revolution—the relation to the State, the relation to bourgeois democracy, the forms and methods of struggle, the character of the revolution, the conditions of the conquest of power, the form of the workers' power, &c. Vagueness and ambiguity on these questions is the surest sign of opportunism, of practical subordination to existing capitalism, under cover of a few revolutionary phrases, without any intention of serious struggle. Does the I.L.P. programme answer these questions with a clear line?

THE new I.L.P. programme, it is announced, marks a "definite break" with all previous I.L.P. policy. It is astonishing with what ease a complete leadership turns round on itself and is able to repudiate its whole past. What is the distinctive character that makes this break? The distinctive character, we are told, is that the new programme of the I.L.P. is "definitely Marxist."

The new constitution in both thought and expression marks a definite break with the traditional outlook of the I.L.P. Its basis is definitely Marxist.

(I.L.P. General Secretary, Paton, in the *New Leader*, July 15, 1932.)

And again:

The new constitution of the I.L.P. . . . frankly accepts the Marxian philosophy of the class struggle.

(Editorial statement, *New Leader*, July 22, 1932.)

Thus we have on the best official authority that the new programme of the I.L.P. is now "definitely Marxist." It is as well that they have told us in commenting on the programme, because no one in reading the programme might have guessed it. Compare the amazing statement of the "Object":

The political objective of the I.L.P. will be a State in which work of social value will be the basis of livelihood, and all who do such work shall have equal rights of citizenship.

Shades of the "Critique of the Gotha Programme"! After all Marx's painful teaching on the question of the State, the objective of socialism is stated to be "a State." And what a jumbling together of the socialist objective and undigested fragments of the transitional period, the whole tied up in one parcel as "the political objective." However, we have no time to spend on details, and need to concentrate solely on the central question of the conception of the line of the revolutionary struggle. Let us therefore content ourselves with noting that the I.L.P. now consider their programme and basis "definitely Marxist"—a very useful starting point for discussion.

NOW Marxism is a very definite thing. It is not a matter of repeating one or two phrases, or picking up a fancy name for purposes of decoration. It is not a kind of new hat which a millionaire can buy to add to his wardrobe, alongside his other headgear. Marxism is complete, systematic and all-inclusive theory and practice, affecting the whole outlook, approach and line in relation to every question and the whole practical activity. A party which has consistently followed opportunism cannot "become Marxist" overnight by the adoption of a few sentences in its programme—*without changing* its whole existing line, literature, propaganda, activity and also, in practice, its leadership. But it is only necessary to pick up any page of the I.L.P. organ at the present day, or to look at any pamphlet, to see how fantastic and ridiculous is the claim that the I.L.P. is now "Marxist," how completely the same old slovenly, confused approach, under full bourgeois influence, to every question still goes on. However, we are only concerned now to deal with the central line of the programme. Marxism has a very definite and exact teaching on the questions of the State, of bourgeois democracy, of the working-class struggle, of the conquest of power, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the rôle of force, of civil war, &c. Is this teaching the teaching of the I.L.P.? *The line of Marxism is in fact the line of Communism*—of the Communist Manifesto, of all the theory and practice of Marx and Engels, of the early social democratic parties before the

opportunist, revisionist corruption, of Lenin, of the October Revolution, of the Communist International? *Is this line the line of the I.L.P.?* If not, why not?

TAKE first the central question of the State and capitalist democracy. Marx taught that the State in capitalist society is and can only be the organ of the capitalist dictatorship; that this is true "in a democratic republic no less than in a monarchy" (Engels, 1891 Preface to Marx's "Civil War in France"); that universal suffrage can only be a barometer of the degree of development of the working class, but cannot be in any sense the means to the conquest of State power:

Universal suffrage is an index of the maturity of the working class; it cannot, and will not, give anything more in the present State.

(Engels: "Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.")

that the proletariat cannot take over the existing State machine for its own purposes:

The working class cannot simply seize the available ready machinery of the State and set it going for its own ends.

(Marx and Engels: 1872 Preface to the "Communist Manifesto.")

but that the working class must "smash" the existing State machine (Marx: Letter to Kugelmann, 1871) and set up in its place its own dictatorship, the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

Between capitalist and communist society there lies a period of revolutionary transformation from the former to the latter. A stage of political transition corresponds to this period, and the State during this period can be no other than the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. (Marx: Letter to Bracke, 1875.)

All this is the most elementary ABC of Marxism, familiar to every tyro.

AND now turn to the I.L.P. new "revolutionary" "Marxist" programme:

The Independent Labour Party believes that electoral activity for the capture of all the organs of government, national and local, is essential, recognising that such control would be of the greatest importance in the change from capitalism to socialism.

Is it not obvious that we have fallen at once here from any pretence of Marxism to the most commonplace Labour parliamentarism, to the full plane of capitalist-democratic politics. Gone is the conception of universal suffrage as only a barometer of working-class development; gone is the conception of revolutionary parliamentarism, of the use of elections and parliament only as a platform for revolutionary agitation and propaganda. Electoral and parliamentary activity is to be carried on "*for the capture of all the organs of government.*" Here we have the typical, basic Labour conception of winning a parliamentary majority to take over the capitalist state machine; which means in practice, if there is to be any question of a parliamentary majority, developing the I.L.P. as a full parliamentary capitalist-democratic governmental party. The ineffable Maxton promises at Bradford "to try to get a parliamentary majority for the I.L.P. in the next five years." And when some left delegates tried to "substitute a clause which would place more emphasis on creating a revolutionary movement where Parliament would be used for propaganda purposes only," Beckett, on behalf of the platform, secured its rejection with the following revealing statement:

He pointed out the difficulty of trying to fight parliamentary elections if the public at the same time had to be told that parliament was of no use. *If the I.L.P. did not believe in municipal and national government, it would have to work underground to bring about a real revolution. He urged that the I.L.P. should work through local and national machinery for government, and man it with people it could trust.* (*New Leader*, August 5, 1932.)

This spokesman of the official policy has let the cat out of the bag. The official policy is revealed as unadulterated *parliamentary ministerialism*, which is correctly shown to involve *rejection of revolution*.

WHAT, then, of "revolution" and "revolutionary working-class struggle" and the "revolutionary conquest of power," of which the I.L.P. to-day speaks so much. The Marxist teaching on Revolution is so clear that none can miss it.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution.

(Marx and Engels : "The Communist Manifesto.")

"The *forcible* overthrow of all existing social conditions." Note well, Brother Brockway of the "pacifist technique" of revolution.

In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.

(Marx and Engels : "The Communist Manifesto.")

"*The violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie.*" Note well, Mr. "Marxist" Murry. Nothing about only "a revolution in the minds and hearts of the people" here. Nothing about "Keep the Revolution in the right place—in your hearts and minds." Better to think twice before you wish to go on calling yourself a "Marxist." Far, far better to stick to Christ and Lawrence and the profitable exhibition of the recesses of your soul.

These gentlemen, have they ever seen a Revolution? Revolution is undoubtedly the most authoritative thing possible. Revolution is an act in which one part of the population forces its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets, cannon, *i.e.*, by most authoritative means. And the conquering party is inevitably forced to maintain its supremacy by means of that fear which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Had the Paris Commune not relied on the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie, would it have lasted longer than a single day?

(Engels : Letter against the Anarchists, 1873.)

"*Revolution is an act by which one part of the population forces its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets, cannon.*"

"*Arms.*" "*The armed people against the bourgeoisie.*" Run away, Mr. Brockway, and give up calling yourself a "Marxist" or attacking the "Russian" (!) conception "that the change from capitalism to socialism must come by the method of armed civil war." (Debate with Pollitt). Marxism was not made to be the plaything of fools; and the workers in Britain

also are beginning to learn the character of the capitalist dictatorship, built on force and only conquerable by force.

AND now turn to the I.L.P. Programme, this "revolutionary" "Marxist" programme. What has it to say on "Revolution," of which its orators spout so much? Nothing, friends, nothing at all. Not even the word, cheap as they have tried to make that word of power, which is not for their lips. Here is nothing about the "dictatorship of the proletariat" or "soviets" or such like matters outside the staid, respectable parliamentary-trade union circumference. Instead we find the following cautious little adventure into the unknown:

It realises that the interests behind Capitalism are likely to offer resistance, by any and every means, to any attempt to dispossess them of the economic and political power on which their privileges depend, and, particularly in the circumstances of a complete economic breakdown, to resort to some form of dictatorship in opposition to economic and social changes. The minds of the workers must be prepared for such a situation, and they must be made ready to meet it and overcome it by the use of their mass strength for the capture of power.

Splendid vagueness! The capitalists *may*, nay, are "likely" to "resort to some form of dictatorship." So there is no capitalist dictatorship at present? And *then* (*i.e.*, *after* Hitler-Mussolini are in power, have entrenched themselves), the workers will show them (did not the Italian workers? whose Socialist leaders also promised much, but opposed decisive action *before* Mussolini came to power) Then, then all gaily for "mass strength for the capture of power." But this will only be after a hypothetical (very hypothetical) I.L.P. Government has begun to try to "dispossess" the capitalists. Till then, sleep quiet in your beds, dear capitalists. Or in the event of a "complete economic breakdown" and a fully fledged capitalist dictatorship established and well entrenched. Then, with plenty of odds against, full steam ahead for "mass strength for the capture of power." Fine: and what does that mean? Mum's the word, says the Programme. The paragraph stops there, and the Programme takes a big breath

and goes on with the "immediate urgency" of a "fundamental transformation of the economic system" and a "Socialist Plan for this decisive change"; "the capture of power by the working class must be used for the immediate application of this comprehensive plan." But how did they capture power? We don't know, but we know how they didn't. "Not armed conflict," says Brockway (Chairman's Address to the 1932 Annual Conference); "by political or industrial means," *i.e.*, parliamentarism or trade unionism and the passive strike, which never yet won power anywhere and never will.

BUT this is nothing but the old Labour Programme and the old I.L.P. Programme over again? Precisely. It is our old friend "*Parliamentary Democracy, plus If.*" If the capitalists, &c., then we shall show them. Until then, "work through Parliament was probably the best method" (Skinner, on behalf of the N.A.C. at the Bradford Conference). What says the old I.L.P. Constitution of 1922?

The Independent Labour Party recognises that circumstances may arise when a Government or reactionary class might attempt to suppress liberty or thwart the national will, and it holds that to defeat such attempt Democracy must use to the utmost extent its political and industrial power.

(I.L.P. Constitution, adopted Annual Conference, 1922.)

Is there any respect in which the "new" "revolutionary" Programme of 1932 goes beyond this? "Circumstances may arise." "Political and industrial power." *It is the same old nonsense, the same dreary emptiness that the I.L.P. has mumbled all these years.* Not only that, but the great prototype and spiritual father of them all, MacDonald, himself went further, even as late as 1924:

It has always been recognised that political democracy might be prevented until by revolution it seized political power, that social democracy might be challenged by capitalism and the ruling classes, and that conflicts, that were not political, but might be by arms, might ensue.

(J. R. MacDonald: "The Story of the I.L.P. and What It Stands For," 1924.)

“ Might be by arms.” How the old father of them all outstrips the puny infants who try to tread in his footsteps. This sentence, which bears the true noble stamp of a MacDonald sentence in its ponderous labyrinthine meaninglessness (the deeper you delve into a MacDonald sentence, the less it means), should teach a lesson to the stammering, stumbling Maxton-Brockway urchins of how they can touch on even the thorny question of “ arms ” (with plenty of “ might . . . might ”) without danger.

THUS the circle is completed, and we are back at the full old normal Labour basis as the sum-total and final outcome of the grand “ new ” “ revolutionary ” “ Marxist ” programme of the I.L.P. adopted at Bradford. And as the crowning indignity, the old right wingers of the I.L.P., the official Labourists, and even the bourgeoisie, who should all be gnashing their teeth or at any rate shaking their heads with horror at the reckless daring of these rebels, smile an indulgent smile and remark that the “ new ” programme is very like the old Labour programme, redecorated with a few fancy phrases.

The new I.L.P. Manifesto was full of revolutionary phrases, but there was no difference in policy between it and the new policies of the Labour Party.

(E. F. Wise at the Bradford Conference, *New Leader*, August 5, 1932.)

Mr. Maxton and Mr. Brockway, two able and sincere men, whose loss to the Labour Party we regret, believe that they can best further the cause of socialism by building up a new party and a new constitution, much resembling the old, save for the embellishment of a few revolutionary phrases which no one has clearly defined.

(*Daily Herald* Editorial, August 1, 1932.)

The Conference has not, however, defined revolutionary socialism. Like the Executive Committee, the Conference has been content with evasion of that rather dangerous duty. . . . Deliberate ambiguity only cloaks with timidity the intention.

(*Times* Editorial, August 1, 1932.)

In view of this situation, it is not surprising that several prominent representatives of the present I.L.P. leadership have

already been making open hints of possible future reunion with the Labour Party. Thus Campbell Stephen spoke in the following terms at the Bradford Conference :

If the local I.L.P. branches were loyal to the disaffiliation decision and cut adrift, the Labour Party would be compelled to realise that it could not carry on in the autocratic way of the past, and that it must consider new policies.

And the ex-Chairman Wallhead, "who was greeted with a display of real affection," stresses the *New Leader* report :

Begged the delegates not to widen the breach with the Labour Movement more than possible, as eventually, after doing their utmost to mould the workers' minds, they would have to come to some form of unity. (*New Leader*, August 5, 1932.)

WE would therefore say very seriously to all left I.L.P. members who have fought for disaffiliation from the Labour Party and for a revolutionary policy:—*The seeming "victory" against Labourism and for revolution at Bradford is not yet a victory.* King Stork is only replaced by King Log. This is not a mere question of leadership, it is a question of the whole line and policy. The policy is still a policy of reformism, of capitalist democracy, of pacifism, of avoidance of the struggle, even though the phrases used are more cunning. The talk of "Marxism," the talk of "Revolution," is demonstrable deceit. The real fight for revolutionary policy has still to be fought. This fight can end in one goal only—the goal of Communism. The line of Revolutionary Marxism is the line of Communism—of the Communist Manifesto, of all the theory and practice of Marx and Engels, of the early social democratic parties before the opportunist, revisionist corruption, of Lenin, of the October Revolution, of the Communist International. Lay aside all smaller considerations, all difficulties with or disapprovals of the existing Communist Party in Britain, which is only a nucleus, a beginning, and which will grow strong, as more workers make it strong. Judge only the big basic issues of Communism, and above all the necessity, the vital, urgent necessity of building a powerful united revolutionary working-class party

in Britain, a true mass party of Communism, of the Communist International. This is the indispensably necessary path forward, the sole path forward, for all left I.L.P.-ers. The alternative is to become only pawns and covers of the left reformism which at present holds the leadership of the I.L.P. and seeks to take to itself the fruits of the Bradford "victory." Only determined fight of all sincere left workers in the I.L.P., which must and will lead to unity with the Communist Party, can defeat these manœuvres, can drive the way forward to big increase in revolutionary working-class strength and unity in Britain.

R. P. D.