

The Dilemma of the British Labor Party

By JOHN PEPPER.

THE sharpening of class antagonism in Great Britain begins to express itself also within the powerful mass organization of the British proletariat, the labor party. More and more clearly appears the contour of a right and a left wing in the labor party. Ever larger proletarian masses affiliate from below with the labor party but at the same time the official party leadership marches even further toward the right. The official MacDonald leadership is making the greatest efforts to convince the bourgeois world that they are really not so very dangerous; that they are really not the class party of the proletariat, but a universal party in the old liberal sense of the word.

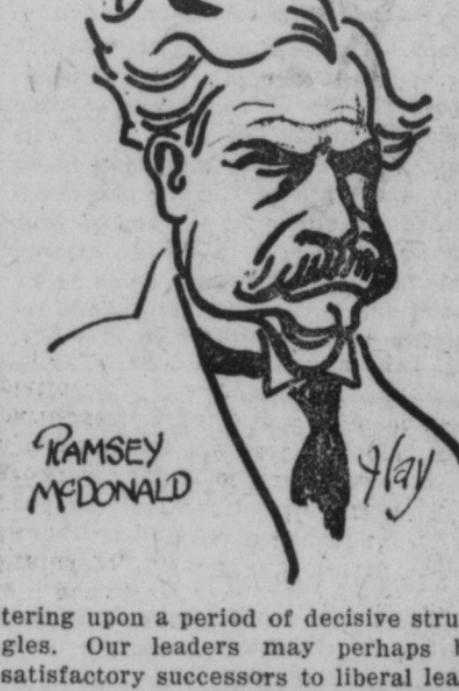
The government of Great Britain proceeds (and quite systematically) with ever sharper measures against the working class. The persecution of the Communists is only a preparation by which the government seeks to expose to its attack the left flank of the working class. The conservatives speak up openly for a general attack against the trade unions. Unemployment insurance is beginning to be handled with brutal rigor. Hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers have been stricken from the maintenance lists in recent months. The government is proceeding with all war preparations for the month of May when the conflict in the coal industry will break out and when it must be fought to a conclusion. In addition to the unofficial fascist organization the government is founding official strike-breaker organizations, it is arming a special police force.

THE working class views the conservative government's preparations with growing uneasiness and begins also to demand from its leaders that they prepare themselves for the fight. The right leaders of the MacDonald stripe seek to retreat from the battle, seek to surrender the interests of the proletariat undefended to the bourgeoisie. A dual danger menaces the present labor party if it continues to remain inactive; on the one side its masses could be diverted leftward toward the Communists; on the other, discouraged and disillusioned, they might return to the liberals.

This dual danger has now impelled to action the left wing leaders of the labor party. They openly support the persecuted and imprisoned Communists partly because they know that after the wiping out of the Communists the attack will be directed against themselves, but partly also to show the masses that they are at least as left, as revolutionary, as the Communists. At the same time, however, they try to push the leadership of the labor party toward the left. This is the explanation of the demonstrative attitude of Wheatley, Wedgewood, Lansbury and Maxton in withdrawing from the executive committee of the labor party because it does not wage the class struggle with sufficient energy, because it adapts itself too far to bourgeois parliamentarism, thereby they seek to assure themselves a free hand for their political activities. Twenty other labor party M. P.'s have identified themselves with the four left leaders of the labor party and there is now not only the possibility, but even the probability that an organized left wing of the British labor party will crystallize around these leaders.

HOW far the movement for the organization of a left wing in the labor party has already progressed is

shown by expressions by such actually non-revolutionary leaders like Brailsford, the editor of the *New Leader*, the official organ of the independent labor party. He writes: "A growing number of comrades demand a more aggressive party leadership in parliament, a different tone on the platform of the public meetings and the expression of the feeling in everything the party does that we are en-



tering upon a period of decisive struggles. Our leaders may perhaps be satisfactory successors to liberal leadership, they hold their own in the parliamentary debates, they bear themselves with distinction on ceremonial occasions, they play the political game according to all traditional rules in order to be able soon to succeed the conservative government. But are they fighting with the enthusiastic determination expected from a general staff in this critical period of class struggle? Are their speeches and tactical moves in parliament the expression of the grim determination of the masses to give battle? This attitude is lacking in the house. It is absent also in MacDonald's public speeches and above all it was utterly undiscernable in the speeches at the Liverpool party congress." Lansbury's *Labor Weekly* also turns more and more sharply against the MacDonald leadership and states that a great danger threatens; that out of the labor party a neo-liberal party be formed. Of what use is the mighty party machine, the paper asks, if we do not use it in the class struggle?

The loss of industrial monopoly more and more radicalizes the British working class. The left wing found its first organization form in the "minority Movement" of the trade unions. It is a mighty step forward when the left wing now commences to organize itself also upon the political field. The labor party in its present-day form and with its current tactic is a means for "liberalization" of the British working masses. An organized left wing can block this liberalization process, can serve as the crystallization point for gathering the broadest masses into the camp of the class struggle. The great miners' conflict next May will of course sharply bring to a head all these antagonisms. The crisis of next May will not only signify for Great Britain a social crisis on the broadest scale, but likewise a fateful crisis for the labor party. Unless all signs fail the MacDonald leadership will finally betray the fighting working class and thereby—since the organization of the labor party's left wing can only be a short-lived interlude—make possible the formation of a Communist mass party.