

Socialists and the State

ANYONE who goes around the country delivering lectures to branches of widely different schools of socialist thought soon becomes aware at the present time of the ferment of ideas about the nature of the State and its utility to the workers, and also of the ever-growing influence upon the rank and file of the literature of the S.L.P. The National Guilds League may be securing the ear of the great majority of middle-class socialists, who are naturally attracted by its sympathetic programme and its recognition of the position of the consumers, consumers who, in this case, find it very difficult to conceive of themselves as fitting into any great organization of producers, and there being able to exert the influence which they have grown accustomed to regard as

Socialism after the War. J. Ramsay MacDonald. National Labour Press, Ltd. 1/-.
The State: Its Origin and Function. S. Paul, S.L. Press. Paper, 1/3; Cloth, 2/6.

theirs by right and of necessity. The Guildsmen have, however, very little hold upon the rank and file, who only know them when introduced thereto by their trusted leaders and approved propagandists. These divide their patronage over anti-war literature of a generally pacifist character and the writings of the industrial unionists who speak their tongue and voice their aspirations. The I.L.P., which, as a body, had paid little heed to the "rebel" voices before the War, and which believed fervently in nationalisation and in the sovereignty of the State, has had its faith greatly disturbed as a result of the war-time legislation and the extension of executive authority. Some of its members hark back to the *laissez-faire* position which they may originally have held, and one hears a great deal to-day in some quarters about it being "the heart that matters." Individualism has naturally seized hold of those who had no strong organization to defend them against the military and the police, and who yet felt that their conscience and their movement required of them a vigorous if utterly futile protest. But in that direction there is no escape from the rigours of the capitalist system, and however much they may return to Norman Angel and to Bertrand Russell, these have nothing to offer them except a modification of socialism along middle-class and pacifist lines. The logic of events, especially events in Russia and developments in the workshop, is swinging the rank and file back towards reliance on working-class mass action, revolutionary rejection of all capitalist institutions and ideals, and to an insistence on the self-respect and independence of labour, which anyone but an I.L.P.'er would bluntly call "class consciousness." In the B.S.P, the tide of industrial unionism is sweeping through the membership with such a force as to compel the leaders to recognise the new needs. Everywhere the rank and file are looking more and more towards the movement which was cradled on the Clyde and in the Rhondda, and has now come into Merthyr with Ablett. The issue is narrowing, whilst at the same time a greater solidarity and a stronger desire amicably to discuss our differences of opinion is taking hold of the several socialist organizations. The fact of the S.L.P. and Ramsay McDonald having occasionally found themselves with their backs against the same wall has led to criticisms of the latter being cleared of what his supporters regarded as personal abuse, whilst a common antipathy to the Hyndman school has almost given them a bond of sympathy. This being the case we find ourselves able to take the books of W. Paul and Ramsay McDonald and work up their lessons into a common theme. They are, of course, parted still by a great gulf because the one is Marxian throughout his treatment of the subject and the other quite patiently discloses his hostility to what he regards as Marxism. McDonald has not seen good to follow Edward Bernstein in a recantation of Revisionism, though one feels, in going through the book that he is not so firmly

fixed in his heresies as he used to be. He has several comments upon the failure of the class-war advocates and the Marxian parliamentarians who have gone "wallowing into the ditch of Prussianism" just as deep as the Labour Party. We would respectfully point out to him that he might have examined the *personnel* of the German Majority and the German Minority when he would have found his Revisionists among the former and a solid phalax of Marxists composing the latter. Even in this country there is no need to class all the Marxists in the same category as his *bête-noir*, H. M. Hyndman. There are such people as Ablett, Paul, McLean, McManus and Murphy whose only fault is that they belong to the younger generation who are quite as sound on the War as any of the younger members of the I.L.P. With this criticism of a note which mars the book we pass on to rejoice in the author's acceptance and hearty approval of the Shop Steward Committees, and which appear to have kindled his enthusiasm. He continues to talk of Trade Unionism when, quite obviously, he is seeking organization by industry, and to advocate a renewal of Trades Council activity but "in close touch with the workshop, and not merely with the branches as at present." "The workshop, the Workshop Committee, the Shop Steward, passing up through the District Committee and the Trades Council, is a more vital method of organization than the branch, the Branch Committee, and Trades Council and the District Committee as we know them." He is seriously alarmed at the bureaucratic tendencies of the trade unions as they are constituted to-day, and returns to this again and again.

McDonald accepts the Guilds with some reservation because

at any rate we can say, British Socialism never imagined that the political State, working from a bureaucratic centre by political agents, could control the factories and workshops. It is therefore not precluded by past declarations from considering proposals of workshop control on the Guild plan.

But, again—

When we had to deal with Syndicalism of the Sorel School, we had to oppose it.

and, according to him,

The central authority of the State must be used for the co-ordination of production and distribution, of supply and demand. . . . in a sentence it should deal with the general obligations of citizens to each other.

He resurrects the good old hardy annual—

A Guild of Railwaymen cannot be the sole controlling authority of the national railroads.

He is still, therefore, as we suppose he will always be, a State Socialist. His whole outlook is so utterly dominated by current middle-class conceptions, and he is so entirely unable to think of the State as something which has not always been and need not always continue. His whole ideology is that of the society of small proprietors, of private enterprise, of individualism, that he cannot project his mind into the future.

Paul, whose book is a masterpiece of scholarship and painstaking investigation, goes to the very roots of politics. He starts at the beginning of political institutions, indeed, he goes back and shows the nature of tribal relationships and the gentile organization. He traces the rise of private property, and clearly demonstrates the revolution it accomplished in thought, in communal institutions, and in all human associations. He follows the war-chief, the law-giver, and the priest through history, basing his whole record, of course, on his wonderful knowledge of that Marxian master-key, the materialist conception. His survey of Greek and Roman civilisation, his study of the emergence of the European peoples from the right of the Middle Ages, his treatment of feudalism, of the Church, and the Common Law are masterly in their concise summing up of all the many factors which operated through those two thousand years of human struggle. Particularly, his suggestion of the part played by the Christian Church in eradicating gentile traditions and in overthrowing the old gods and taboos of a society founded upon kinship and common holding of land, and his story of the rise of Parliament and the modern state struck me with the ability of this new luminary on the Marxian horizon. If I have a criticism to make it is that he has not given quite adequate attention to the more subtle measures adopted by the governing class in the last half century, to mark their defences against "the enemy at home," or the purpose of the social and educational reform of the last thirty years, nor does he deal at sufficient length with that peculiar ideal "the Socialist Industrial State," which is McDonald's conception of the co-operative Commonwealth.

Having read "The State: Its Origin and Function," the student will have a delightful half-hour in perusing McDonald's chapter, "A Socialist Parliament," which is a veritable swan song of parliamentarianism. He will have the explanation of this tale of woe and this sad lament for the fallen glory of the People's Chamber which can no more be roused from its slumber of death. We are told that

"The representative assembly must be the seat of power, not the handmaiden of Ministers." Parliament . . . has no real control over finance, it has absolutely no control over the Foreign Office . . . it cannot introduce its own legislation or express its own mind in the division lobbies . . . Cabinets should be put in their proper place as servants, convenient for the work of Parliament, not as autocrats controlling Parliament. . . . For some time Parliament itself has been sinking into a state of feeble servitude to its Cabinet and Executive."

The student of Paul will know what was the origin and function of Parliament and what is the nature and purpose of the Cabinet. He will understand that, the Capitalist class having now secured political control, social prestige, and economic overlordship, has no further use for Parliament except as a representative assembly "for recording and approving its decrees." It has no intention

of permitting Ramsay McDonald to lead a proletarian storming-party, up the ladder by which it climbed to assail it in turn and to dispossess it of its property and its power. Surely he has learned by this time that "the executive committee of the capitalist class" has no respect for any moral law except its own, and for no other force but *force majeure*. Not on respect for the House of Commons, but no respect for the might of the organized working-class, does the authority of Socialism depend, as all will know who have read the history of the organ known as the government in that invaluable little book, *The State : Its Origin and Functions*.

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.
