

HOW LABOUR GOES WRONG

THE latest publication of the Labour Publishing Company is a work of quite unusual importance.* It is a study of how Labour rises to power, by the private secretary of the late Hon. John Storey, Labour Premier of New South Wales. It is the first serious study at all of what happens to a constitutional Labour Party when it gains or approaches power, by the means favoured by our right wing leaders here. The case of Russia is entirely different, so is that of Germany. Labour in Australia has done precisely what Labour here desires to do ; it has secured political power by means of the ballot box. The Labour Party there consists of a very similar amalgam of political groups and trade unions. The problems which they have had to face and failed to handle are precisely those which are going to face the Labour Party here some day.

Childe's book is practically a history of Australian Labour, especially its recent history. The volume before us contains several sections. Firstly a logical analysis of the Labour Party machinery. This, because it is duller, is put first. Secondly, an account of the attempts to control the politicians. Thirdly, an account of the heterogeneous elements that make up the Labour Party. Turning to the industrial side, the author gives a history of the movement, of the attempts at federation and then amalgamation, of the revolt against politicians, of the extraordinary career of the I.W.W., and of the One Big Union movement.

We have then a study of a movement which very considerably resembles our own, but it has this advantage—that it has in every way developed further and is of a limited area suitable for study. The Labour Parties in Australia have actually been in power in New South Wales, and in Queensland for a long period ; and for short periods in the Commonwealth Government. The industrial unionist movement has got as far as floating a fully drawn up One Big Union. In both cases enormous mistakes have been made, but often mistakes from which something can be learnt.

Over fifty pages deal with the efforts made to control politicians when they get in, or near, power. They are mostly a record of

* *How Labour Governs*, by V. G. Childe (Labour Publishing Company, 12s. 6d.). The book contains an unusual number of technical faults. The printing and binding and paper are not very good for 12s. 6d. It is really Volume I. of a work in two volumes, but this is not stated in the book ; instead, a purely superficial attempt is made to make it look like a complete work. The title is not the correct one for this first volume. The author's own attitude is inconsistent in various places in the book, and always obscure.

failures. In the hope of holding the politicians to the Labour programme, after all a reasonable request, the party eventually worked out a system of triple controls. The politicians were firstly controlled by the Caucus, which is the Parliamentary Party. Secondly, by the Executive, which eventually claimed to pass all bills before a Labour Government should introduce them. Thirdly, the annual conference passes a platform, which the Labour Government is bound to observe strictly and treat as sacred, passing the bills therein contained.

These triple controls have been brought about because of various past conflicts. Yet they are not effective. For example, in 1911 Neilson, Lands Minister, was vigorously carrying out the unpopular—with the farmers—policy of resumption of Crown Lands. The Labour Government had a majority of two. Two members in sympathy with the farmers then resigned their seats, alleging that they had discovered they could not agree with the platform. Faced with the prospect of defeat, the Government ignored the platform, dismissed Neilson, and put in his place one of the resigners. Moreover, not only do Governments not obey Caucus and Convention, but they have actually artfully turned Caucus discipline, meant to check them, into a device for stifling criticism. These attempts at control have not held in the politicians in any way, or forced them to carry out a Socialist policy. On the contrary, men like Holman, Ryan, Theodore, and Hughes have in their time practically been autocrats. They have not even secured the Party the elementary right to choose who shall be Ministers. "In 1919 J. M. Hunter was holding no less than three portfolios in a temporary capacity, although Caucus had more than once laid it down that this gentleman was to be only an honorary Minister." (Queensland.)

But as Labour begins to approach power, other interests appear in its ranks to exercise in some cases the control which the Party fails to do. The two most striking, and surprising, influences in Australia appear to be the Roman Catholic Church and the liquor trade. The small ("cocky") farmer element we expect, but these are new allies. In the case of the booze trade, they are allies who have their price. In Queensland, and in New South Wales until the Federal military authorities intervened, the Labour Governments allowed absolutely unrestricted drinking during the war—again throwing the platform to hell. They reaped their reward at the elections, when every public house showed Labour colours and the licensed victuallers' cars collected Labour voters. The methods of the cementing of this alliance in N.S.W. were exposed in Parliament afterwards. Among other things,

The secretary of the Licensed Victuallers' Association had given a member of the State Parliament (whose name will be found in the Federal Hansard)

£500 to control conference in the interests of the trade in 1921. The same gentleman was subsequently told by official members of the State Ministry not that he must not contribute to the Party funds but that he must cease subsidising private members.

These methods have had their effect upon the personnel of the Labour Party. "Boodlers" seem to swarm; there is a dreadful stink of corruption about all this narrative. From outside the curse of graft rots the Party right through until it gets as bad as forged ballots in Unions (p. 67) in the selection of candidates. Worse than all, these have been exposed and nothing, it appears, has happened.

Given this corruption, and certain other difficulties, the industrial movement also falls into its own slough of despond. The Australian Workers' Union, an immense body, claims to be the "One Big Union," the aim of the recent revolutionary agitation in Australia. It has certain appearances of being such, in extent and character of membership. But it is a "mass union"; all its members are a great lump, undifferentiated and just catalogued by residence, not industrially. Because of this, and of the great differences, the ruling clique of officials, of none too good reputation, have dug themselves in so that they cannot possibly be moved. The use to the workers of this union is growing less and less. The craft unions, positively, were better.

The absorbing analysis of one fight between this union and the real O.B.U. propagandists fills the last chapter of the book. But before the end is reached of this chronicle of apparent success and real disaster, a shaft of unsteady light has appeared. The story of the I.W.W. in the earlier chapters brings us suddenly an echo of the heroism and enthusiasm of real revolutionaries, of "Boston and Valmy, Yorktown and Jemmappes." For the first time there were men who urged the workers to fight for themselves alone. They carried the class-struggle to its uttermost limit: sabotage, note-forgery, burning Sydney. They sacrificed themselves without question. Hitherto we have only read of this or that place taken by a Labour leader, this or that bribe accepted, this or that election wangled. Now for the first time it is of heavy sentences, frame-ups by the police, mobbing by patriotic roughs that we hear. Here is something at last to admire.

"You were the fool that charged a windmill. Still

The miller is a knave and was afraid."

And from the I.W.W., thinks our author with reluctant admiration, came all that the Labour movement has done recently in Australia—the stoppage of conscription, the consequent expulsion and the One Big Union movement.

R. W. POSTGATE.