

## TRADE UNIONISM AND THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY

The Trade Unions and Miner's Unions reached their high-water mark in the early seventies of 19<sup>th</sup> century. After that there have been many organizations (railway staff, gas-stokers, agricultural laborers), but this "New Unionism" of the seventies died out in the trade depression which reached its height in 1879. Early in the eighties a new revival we see in the movement: in 1881 the Yorkshire miners amalgamated to form the Yorkshire Miners' Association, in 1882 the Lancashire Miners united to form the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation. And here a new, and very important personality of the English working class movement entered the scene. James Keir Hardie /1856-1915/ born in Lanark shire, was the son of a ship's carpenter. He had to work as a child, first as a newspaper boy then he became a miner in one of the borderland mines. He educated himself at night schools, and in the debating societies, learnt the art of public speaking and very soon moved into trade unionism, organizing first the miners in Lanarkshire and later he became active in the Ayrshire Miners' Union in the West of Scotland, of which he became the first secretary on its reorganization. In 1886 the various Unions in Scotland joined together in the Scottish Miners' Federation.

In 1888 a new movement was started. The truly radical districts decided at a National Conference to form a new Federation of their own. Thus the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was born. It began with only 36,000 members, but rose rapidly to over 200,000 in 1893. And finally the delegates of the new Miners' Federation became a power at the Trade Union Congress.

In other industries, also, new Unions were arising (General Union of Textile Workers, Weavers' Association, United Textile Factory Workers' Association, Steel Smelters' Union, Tea Operatives' and General Labourers' Union, National Sailors' and Firemen's Union).

The first really organized attack of the "new" Unionists came in 1887, at the first Congress attended by Keir Hardie, when the Congress voted - besides many other problems - for the Nationalization of the Land.

In the meantime, the Social Democrats had placed themselves at the head of the unemployed agitation. Protectionism, under the name of "Fair Trade", was in these years the theme of an active campaign. In January 1886, the Fair Traders arranged for a demonstration. The Social Democrats at once organized a counter demonstration of the unemployed for the same time and place. The leading figures were then arrested, and after trial, were acquitted by the jury.

In 1887, the Social Democrats demonstrated on the Irish question. They clashed with the police, and many people suffered injuries, while many others were arrested. That day came to be known as "Bloody Sunday".

During these years the propaganda of the Socialists was immense it really "reached the ears" of the ordinary workmen. Not only the Fabians, but also the socialist press published enormous number of leaflets and pamphlets.

In 1887 Keir Hardie founded the Miner, which grew into the Labour Leader two years later. In 1888 Champion started The Labour Elector and Annie Besant another new journal The Link, devoted chiefly to the struggle for free speech and the rights for public meeting and procession.

The leaders of the new Trade Union movement, with a few exceptions, "were as vehement as the employers against State regulations of wages and conditions, and believed in settling all issues by methods of conciliation which rested on the assumption that the real interests of Capital and Labour were the same".(1)

The Socialists reacted against this view, and this was the basis of the Social Democratic Federation's attack on Trade Unions in 1884. Later, under the influence of some leaders the S.D.F. changed its policy.

The Socialists' lack of success can be attributed to several reasons. One was the dominant personality and exclusively political outlook of Hyndman. A second one was the use of a pedantic Marxist phraseology which was almost completely alien from the English workmen. A third reason was that the S.D.F. had to pay the penalty of being the pioneer.

The "New" Unionists were hardly less political in outlook than the S.D.F., and, as far as their immediate programme was concerned, were advocating similar reforms. And their tendency was to concentrate attention on those reforms. Inevitably, the outcome of their propaganda, as soon as trade became good enough to offer a hope of success, was an outbreak of strikes.

But in the second half of the eighties "the movement for Labour representation took a new direction. Keir Hardie stood as Independent Labour candidate in a three-cornered by-election at Mid-Lanark. The "Lib-Lab" leaders of the Labour Electoral Association first tried to persuade him to withdraw, and then opposed him, and he got only 712 votes. But the results were far-reaching. At the beginning of 1889 the Scottish Labour Party came into being as a direct outcome of the contest. A new movement for Labour representation was beginning outside and apart from the Social Democratic Federation"(2).

In 1889, there was a rapid growth of organizations in all parties of the country. In 1891, the London Trades' Council formed a London Labour Representation Committee. Many of the branches of the "Lib-Lab" Labour Electoral Association changed sides and rallied to the cause of independent labour representation. In 1890 Joseph Burgess started the Workman's Times, but in 1894 Keir Hardie's Labour Leader took its place.

We had seen how significant step was the publication of the Fabian Essays towards the clarification of a distinct socialist-labour policy and tactics. Along with the new developments of the Trade Union Revival, the Fabians led by Shaw and Sidney Webb, poured out a steady stream of useful and informative tracts: An Eight Hours Bill /1889, S. Webb/; What Socialism Is? /1890, B. Shaw/; English Progress Towards Social Democracy /1890, S. Webb/; A Labour Policy for Public Authorities /1891, S. Webb/; A Fabian Election Manifesto /1892, B. Shaw/; The Fabian Society: What It has Done and How It has Done It /1892, B. Shaw/; Christian Socialism /1892, Rev. Stewart D. Headlam/; Vote! Vote! Vote! /1892, B. Shaw/; Socialism: True and False /1894, S. Webb/; A Plan of Campaign for Labour /1894, B. Shaw/, and many others. The Socialists had at last an efficient press, and a good supply of propagandist literature.

The General Election of 1892 brought them their first parliamentary successes. On the wave of the new movement Keir Hardie was elected for West Ham. The political success of the "Independents" greatly encouraged the Socialists, and led directly to the formation of a national organization. At the 1892 Trade Union Congress a resolution for refusing Trade Union support to all non-Socialist candidates was only defeated by twenty-five votes. The advocates of independent Labour representation held a meeting of their own with Keir Hardie as chairman, and decided to call a national conference for the purpose of forming a new party based upon national lines.

In January 1893 the Conference met at Bradford with Hardie again in the chair. The 120 delegates who met at Bradford comprised delegates from a great variety of "Socialists" and "Labour" groups, including both the S.D.F. and the Fabian Society. Neither of the S.D.F., nor the Society had any intention of merging itself in the new body. The S.D.F. considered the I. L.P. as politically too compromising, while "the Fabian delegate, Bernard Shaw, insisted that the Fabian Society could be most useful if it continued as a separate body its work of Socialist research, education and permeation of all who were open to its influence".(3)

Finally the Conference formed the Independent Labour Party, rejecting by a large majority the alternative names of Socialist Labour Party.

The great number of delegates representing provincial bodies from all parts of England showed that the Independent Labour Party began its existence with a large and widely diffused membership in local bodies. Actually, when the I.L.P. was founded it started to organize socialism on Fabian lines, adopting many significant points of the specific Fabian policy. The Fabian "feature" of I.L.P. policy came partly from the simple fact that one of the Fabian delegates of the Bradford Conference, G. B. Shaw, helped Keir Hardie to formulate the programme of the I.L.P.:

"At the Fabian members' meeting in July' Bernard Shaw gave a long account of the Conference. . . and of his work as delegate to it. ' It is a loss both to history and the gaiety of nations that this account was not preserved; in later years Shaw was liable to summarize the proceedings more briefly, saying for example, 'I met Keir Hardie on the stairs, and in two minutes told him what to do". (4)

The Fabian support of the I.L.P. policy was of course more ambiguous than the quoted above anecdote could suggests. Though on very many points the Fabians and Keir Hardie's group agreed they disagree very much on two basic points:

"The first was, whether there should be anew party at all or whether the venture was premature, doomed to be abortive and likely to make it more rather than less difficult to get working men into Parliament. Shaw had no hope of carrying the delegates on that point; the tide of feeling in the provinces was running far too strongly against him. The second was whether the new party should leave its branches and individual members free to link up with other organizations with similar aim. The delegates were not impressed by Shaw's defence of permeation. . . . and . . . voted down purists. . . simply to avoid embarrassing trade unionists whose organizations, like the miners' unions, had close links with the Liberal Party". (5)

So in spite of the fact, that Shaw asserted he had advised Keir Hardie what to do and how to do it, /though probably his suggestions were clever and useful/ he with De Mattos were quite unpopular at the Conference, the delegates even debated his credentials and the final agreement augmented the distance between the Society and the I.L.P. This final agreement was based essentially "on two points; that the creation of a labour party in Parliament was to be achieved by independent action, opposing both of the main parties and refusing to seek electoral favors from either; and that, as the decision to keep the headquarters out of London symbolized, the leadership was to be kept in the hands of the provincials". (6)

It was really symbolic, that the London headquarters of the British Socialist movement for a time slipped out of the picture. Almost all the socialist groups felt a kind of uneasiness and neither of them was aware of the strength and significance of the new party.

The aim of the I.L.P. was 'defined in securing "the collective ownership of all the means of production, distribution and exchange". Its programme, drawn up at the Conference, embodied a large number of immediate reforms, mostly to be achieved by legislation;

"These included the legal eight hours' day, the abolition of overtime, piece-work, and child labour, State provision out of taxes on unearned increment for the sick, the disabled, the aged, the widows and the orphans, the provision of

properly paid work for the unemployed, the extension of the franchise, and the reform of taxation". (7)

The wording of this programme, all its smaller details revealed it to be the programme of an independent, working-class political party, which party refused the revolutionary endeavors of the S.D.F. designing its whole policy on a reformist platform, thus "Between the permeative tactics of the Fabians . . . and the Marxian revolutionism of the S.D.F., Keir Hardie and his colleagues aimed at keeping a middle course". (8)

The new party was firmly opposed to any kind of collaboration with the Liberals. They were no less hostile to the S.D.F., which, they alleged, scared away Trade Unionists by its talk of revolution.

The aim of Keir Hardie and his friends was to establish a political party under Socialist leadership and guidance, to concentrate their propaganda mainly on immediate reforms, in the hope of thus leading the main body of the working class gradually towards Socialism, but definitely based on the mass organization of the Trade Union Movement. Hence, they rejected the word "Socialist" from the title of their organization and preferred the title "Independent Labour", thus we may say that they had started the I.L.P.

Very important support for the I.L.P.'s success in its early days came from Robert Blatchford and his journal, The Clarion, and of his book, Merric England. Blatchford and his friend Alexander M. Thompson gathered round them a team of writers who knew how to write for the common people, and also a host of local groups and organizations - converting more people to socialism than anyone else. With this help, the I.L.P. made rapid headway, while the S.D.F. stagnated. The membership of the I.L.P. grew rapidly, and many new branches were being formed. In 1895 the members quantity stood at 6,000 and included most of the younger Trade Union leaders and the keenest Local Labour workers in many districts. A sort of cooperation developed also between the Fabian Society and the I.L.P. Its basis was the realization that provincial Fabianism had done its work. A provincial I.L.P., branch and the local Fabian group was practically the same thing, the active members of one group were the activists of the other too. Therefore, after 1893 the provincial organization of the Fabian society declined; they did not want to maintain the Fabian organization against that of the I.L.P.

Simultaneously, with the growth and strengthening of the I.L.P., the Trade Union Congress had been reforming itself. After the socialist victory the T.U.C. was charged with being perverted to political manipulations. In 1894- the Parliamentary Committee was asked to control and revise the situation. This revision led to the exclusion of the socialist groups from the Congress. Through years the socialists had to build up again the socialist majority in the Unions and in the Congress and finally in 1899 the Parliamentary Committee was instructed to call a "special Conference of representatives from 'Conservative,

Socialist, Trade Union, and other working- class organizations' in order to 'devise ways and means for the securing of an increased number of Labour Members in the next Parliament'. No mention was made of a levy, and it was by no means clear that any form of permanent organization was proposed. Out of this equivocal resolution arose the Labour Party".

- (1) G. D. H. Cole: A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement op. cit., p. 241
- (2) ibid., p. 241
- (3) ibid., p. 250.
- (4) Margaret Cole: The Story of Fabian Socialism, op. cit., p. 43-44.
- (5) N. and J. Mackenzie: The First Fabians, op. cit. pp. 196-197o
- (6) ibid. p. 197.
- (7) G.D.H. Cole: A Short History ... op. cit. p. 250
- (8) ibid., p. 250
- (9) ibid., pp. 253-54

## Ամփոփում

### Արհմիութենական շարժումը և Անկախ Լեյբորիստական Կուսակցությունը

Հորվաձը անդրադառնում է 19-րդ դարաշրջանի երկրորդ կեսին անգլիական նոր սոցիալիստական շարժման և արհմիութենական քաղաքական գործընթացների մեկնաբանմանն ու նկարագրմանը: Մասնավորապես, ցույց է տրված նոր սոցիալիստական կուսակցության ձևավորման գործում սոցիալիստական կողմնորոշում դավանող տարաբնույթ քաղաքական ուժերի մոտեցումների և մարտավարական բնույթ կրող շահերի բաշխման և միաձուլման տրամաբանությունը, ժամանակի հայտնի մտավորականների առաջին հերթին Բ. Շոուի հասարակական-քաղաքական հայացքների ու դիրքորոշումների ազդեցությունը երկրի քաղաքական զարգացման ուղեգծի պարագայում: Հիշյալ համատեքստում քննարկվում է Ֆաբիանական շարժման և սոցիալիստական դաշնության կողմից նոր սոցիալիստական կուսակցության ուղեգծից որոշակի հեռավորություն պահպանելու շարժառիթները և պատճառները: