

American and british labor



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The dramatic rise of the British Labor Party to the position of His Majesty's opposition in the House of Commons has focused the attention of the entire Western world upon the British labor movement. On the benches where Burke and Gladstone once sat there are now over 140 miners, machinists, weavers, boilermakers and working class leaders ready to take over the government of Great Britain if the conservative parties fail.

The movement which has brought the British working class to the thresh-old of power is not the sudden spurt of a handful of insurrectionists working upon the discontent of the people. It is a conscious and highly organized section of the state moving deliberately toward a new kind of industrial and political society.

The movement has tremendous significance for America because it is a movement of kindred peoples, speaking a common language and struggling in the midst of industrial problems which are not unlike the problems of America. What British labor does in one decade may be done in America in the next. To understand the British labor movement it is well to note first of all that it is a movement of one hundred and twenty-five years' growth. Many of the issues which are today vital in the American labor movement were disposed of fifty years ago in Great Britain.

When America was still predominantly an agricultural country Great Britain had passed through the first and worst stages of the Industrial Revolution. With the introduction of power driven machinery great numbers of workers were brought together under one employer in factories and mills. They were

forced to work fifteen and eighteen hours a day for wages that would now be refused by an errand boy.

They formed unions and went on strikes only to be beaten, imprisoned and exiled. When they demanded a ten-hour day they were denounced as criminals. When they formed a picket line, they were imprisoned for intimidation. Although temporarily defeated in times of industrial depression they did not lose courage. Step by step they won the right to organize, the right to strike, collective bargaining, political power in the state, the reduction of hours, the enormous increase of wages, and a measure of joint control over working conditions.

Every forward step which the British workers have taken has been bitterly fought by the employing classes and has been conceded only when labor demonstrated its superior economic or political power. With such a background of struggle the British labor movement is not a delicate thing. It does not depend on employers' sanctions: it is not concerned about its respectability. It is proud with the pride of a hard won success.

The Rise of the Labour Party

From the back bedroom of Ramsay MacDonald's house in No. 3 Lincoln's Inn Field to the front benches of Parliament in twenty years the Labor Party has come. Its growth is the most inspiring achievement of the British labor movement. It is a party of manual and brain workers, controlled by workers and led by workers. Fifty years ago there was no indication that the workers would ever reject the old parties and create a party of their own.

The growth of the idea of a separate labor party was at first painfully slow. In 1892 Kier Hardie sat alone as the first independent worker to be elected to the House of Commons. He helped to organize the Independent Labor Party, a group of vigorous young socialists who set about to convert the trade unions to believe in the political action of labor. By 1900 they had so far succeeded that the Trades Union Congress appointed a Labor Representation Committee.

Since the formation of this committee, the power of labor in politics has steadily grown. The Labor Party, officially formed in 1906, startled the country in that year by electing 29 members to Parliament. In 1910 the party elected 42 members and in 1918 about 70. In November, 1922, the Labor Party returned 144 representatives and some 10, 000 local and municipal officials. If the increase in the Labor Party vote continues to be as rapid as it was in the years from 1900 to 1922, Great Britain will have a clear majority of labor voters by 1926. The labor votes have increased from 62, 000... socialist societies affiliated in a body of individual members.

The brain workers are joining the party in increasing numbers are being provided for by separate local organizations. The Labour party is controlled by annual conference of delegates from the affiliated organizations and by an executive committee of twenty-three members elected by the conference. The party carries candidate becomes official when he has been approved by the National Executive Committee of the Labor Party. In this scheme of nominating candidates the individual members of the Labor Party are not forgotten.

Their candidates immediately before election, often a constituency has a "prospective" candidate who may be chosen shortly after an election and approved by the national Labour Party who have 43 representatives, but there has been no fundamental clash of interests between the trade-union leaders and the intellectuals. The chief reason for the opposition to the Communist International is that the British workers do not favor the method of revolution adopted by the Communists. Operation in international affairs will be more successful than the similar pledge given by the European socialists before the war.

There are more than twice as many members in trade unions in Great Britain as there are in the United States in proportion to population. Almost every industry has its union or unions with recognition and collective bargaining. The membership of unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress increased from one million in 1895 to six and one-half millions in 1920.

During 1921 and 1922 there was a serious loss in union membership because of unemployment and the financial depression but there were no indications that this loss would be permanent. The 1922 figures showed about five million union members. The Federation of British Industries, the largest employers' organization, representing 16, 000 firms and over 19 billion dollars of capital, in its official report on the control of industry, says: "The principles of trade union representation and collective bargaining are now fully accepted by employers." British employers do not use the term collective bargaining to mean dealing with "Company Unions" or employees' organizations set up by the employers themselves.

There are virtually no "Company Unions" in Great Britain, except the organizations of foremen and supervisors. Most British employers bargain directly with their employees as members of a national or district labor union. It is generally recognized that the workers have the right to choose their own representatives without restriction. They are usually represented in negotiations with employers by their own elected union officers who are specialists in gathering and presenting information about the trade.

In America, the unskilled workers are the last of the manual workers to be organized, with the result that strong craft unions may be found working with unskilled non union, demonstrated during the conduct of great strikes. In the coal strike of the spring and summer of 1921, over 1,000,000 miners were on strike, and approximately 3,000,000 other workers of organizers. It is controlled by the votes of the delegates who have power in proportion to the number of members they represent. (Paul Blanshard - author, Paul Blanshard - author. Publisher: George H. Doran Company. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1923. Page Number: 20.)

The Labour Party was created in 1900: a new party for a new century. Its formation was the result of many years of hard effort by working people, trade unionists and socialists, united by the goal of changing the British Parliament to represent the interests of everybody. Ignored by the Tories and disillusioned with the Liberals, a coalition of different interests came together to push for change at a Conference on Labour Representation in London's Memorial Hall in February 1900.

For many years the new organisation struggled to take root in the British political system. The conference of February 1900 had not even created a proper 'party.' Instead the new body was called the Labour Representation Committee and it had no members, only organisations affiliated to it. In the elections of that year, the new group made little ground. Indeed Labour's leaders worked closely with the 1906-14 Liberal Governments, and relied on their majority to agree measures to help Labour, such as the Trade Disputes Act of 1906, and the payment of MPs in 1911.

But while Labour in Parliament was "hanging from the coat-tails" of the Liberals, Labour in the country was growing apace. The number of constituency parties affiliated rose from 73 in 1906 to 179 by 1914 and before the outbreak of war prevented the expected election, Labour was prepared to field a record number of candidates. When the Liberal Party split in 1916, the Labour Party was well placed to make a challenge for power.

Until the early 1900s, people often worked long hours for low wages. The labor movement began as people started to work together to improve their work conditions. Although there are many laws to protect workers, there are still concerns about working conditions, particularly the use of immigrants and children.

In the 1930s, the labor movement gained momentum. With an abundance of labor, employers could easily replace workers. Labor unions were formed to help workers get organized and bargain for their needs and rights. Workers created unions because groups have more bargaining power than

individuals. When large groups of employees make joint decisions, employers are forced to listen to their concerns. For example, if all the workers in a factory stopped working at the same time, it would be difficult to keep the company operating.

Early unions in North America faced a difficult battle. Employers refused to accept the unions. The courts often declared the unions illegal. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 and other laws required employers to bargain with unions. Political parties and other groups have also become involved with the labor movement.

Organized labor is not as powerful today as it once was. However, many people such as construction, factory, and industry employees are members of unions. Although they have helped workers earn higher wages and better working conditions, some people think they are too powerful.