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Some Recent Political Developments
in the Old Country.

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LABOR PARTY.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on "Some Recent Political Developments in the Old Country," Mr. J. Keir Hardie, M.P., Chairman of the Labor party in the British House of Commons, said :

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—My first desire is to thank you for being good enough to invite me to be present with you to-day. One has undoubtedly a considerable advantage in being thus able, for a few moments, to take your non-political platform to express frankly his opinions. I have been much interested in hearing about your Canadian Club. It must be a strong, aggressive, helpful institution. Its membership embraces men of all politics, and, as a subject for discussion, politics is barred. I recognize it to be a great opportunity and a great privilege to have the opportunity of meeting, as I have to-day, with your Canadian Club. I hope to put before you briefly in the few moments at your disposal a glimpse or two of recent political developments in the Mother Land.

I assume that the most of you are from the Old Country. No? Well, I'm sorry for you if you are not. The majority from Scotland? Ah, then that explains the bounding prosperity of your city and your Dominion. Therefore my brief talk about things as they seem from our point of view at home will not be without interest for you. And while you may agree

or disagree with the Socialist movement, let me say frankly at the outset that the social element has to be reckoned with both in the old world and the new. On the political side there is a tendency toward the development or recrudescence of the spirit of nationalism among the Celtic peoples. The Irish Nationalist movement has taken on a form even more extreme. There is a revival of interest in the national literature. Always well marked among the Irish, the *Sein Fein* movement has recently assumed important proportions. The brightest and most active young Irishmen are devoting themselves to reviving the old tongue and the old literature. Ireland, a nation, not by the grace of England, but by the industry, strength and will-power of the Irish people at home, is their motto. In Wales and Scotland the same tendency is manifest. The Welsh cling tenaciously to the tongue of their fathers. In Scotland the observance of the anniversaries of great historical events, Bannockburn, the betrayal of Wallace, the tales of the Covenanters, the battle of Drumclog, all contribute to the new spirit. The Scottish Celtic literature in its old romance and ballad, in its weird tale of mystery, which Patrick Geddes and William Sharp did so much to foster, is superseding the kail-yard school, which J. M. Barrie inaugurated.

These are movements which represent national thought and feeling. In the arena of politics there has been a pronounced change within the last quarter of a century. In the auld syne republicanism and the disestablishment of the Church were well to the fore, but in latter days they have become mere academic abstractions. Outside of Wales, disestablishment exerts not the smallest influence. As for republicanism, that has disappeared in toto from the programme of the Radical party. Experience has shown that there can be as much tyranny and misgovernment under a President as under a King. The mere changing of a figurehead—shall I say an ornamental figurehead?—of a nation, without a change of system, an alteration of the constitution, is without avail.

The reintroduction of protection came about under suspicious circumstances, and the idea had small sanction at the hands of the masses of the electorate. At this moment protection, whether in the form of preferential trade or in the extreme form of protection pure and simple, is a dead letter in British politics. I don't say it will continue in that condition. People are prosperous now. I can easily understand a period of depression in trade, when millions will be ground in poverty, and specious and plausible arguments will sway thousands of votes.

In the near future, too, one need not be surprised if the Conservatives and Unionists come to terms with the Irish party and, before the close of the present Parliament, offered them a Home Rule measure in exchange for the Irish vote for protection. That, however, is in the region of prophecy and you are not bound to believe it.

Perhaps the greatest surprise at the last general election, however, was the advent of the Labor party. For about sixteen or seventeen years a movement has been going on in the Old Country to create a Labor party quite separate and distinct from either the Liberal party or the Conservative party, and when, at the last election thirty members of the House of Commons were returned under the auspices of the Labor party the country woke up to a fact, the existence of which had not been imagined. It is surprising how ignorant an enlightened press can manage to keep the public! The public only knew of these men as dreamers, as extreme visionaries, and never had been led to think of them as men of average ability, average common sense and average political intelligence.

It was then predicted that we could not make a success of anything. As chairman of the party in the House of Commons, let me say—and I do not say it in the spirit of braggadocio—that the Labor party has made its mark in the legislation of the past session to an extent that no other party has ever done in any previous session of the British Parliament. We're there as a power to be reckoned with.

And it would not appear that electors have lost any of the confidence they reposed in Labor at that time. Within the past ten days there have been two vacancies, at Jarrow and Colne Valley. The bye-elections came on and the Labor candidates won both seats, in spite of the fact that they were both known to be Socialists of the most pronounced type. The Labor party in Britain has come to stay; it will be a growing force and power in politics, and whether for weal or woe will mould the destiny of the country for some time to come.

The Labor party is a combination of two forces—the Trades Union movement and the Socialist movement. These two have formed an alliance for the creation of a Labor party. They do not impose a test of Socialism upon candidates. They leave the choice of a candidate entirely to the people of the constituency. If a Trades Unionist is selected, all sections fall in line, and similarly the party remains united if a Socialist be the choice. The basis of the party is political independence. Experience has proved the necessity of the Labor party being separate and distinct from the existing parties.

These are days when wealth is growing, when there is prosperity in material things, and yet Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman tells us on an authority not to be discredited, that in England, Scotland and Wales thirteen millions of people—or one-third of the entire population—even in periods of prosperity, when employment is general, are always living on or under the poverty line. This is a standing disgrace to both parties. It is, in itself, enough to justify the attempt by the Labor party to remove the causes which produce such disastrous results.

But that has never been my argument for the Labor party. I am of the working class, born into the working class, living among the working class, and I claim for my class the right to every political position of privilege which the nation has to offer. The logical—I hope I may say, the inevitable—outcome of the enfranchisement of the people is the creation of a people's party, charged with the interests of the people.

As to the programme for this People's party, first of all they concentrate on the provision of meals at the public cost for starving school children. A commission appointed to enquire into the physical deterioration of the people found that of 11,000 volunteers in Manchester for the South African war only 1,800 had the physique sufficient to admit them into the army, and that is practically the case all round. Canada and the other lands beyond the seas are draining away our sturdy Highlanders and our agricultural population, and the industrial condition of our town life is so destroying the physique and fibre of the people that we have no longer sufficient to make an army up to the old standard. This fact so alarmed the authorities that a commission and committees were appointed to investigate, and they traced the degeneracy to poverty and underfeeding.

The Labor party declares that every child going to school should be sure of one square meal during school hours. In the city of London alone, under Government school inspection, 25,000 children go to school hungry every morning and sit hungry all day.

The Labor party also seeks to have the laws amended so as to make some provision and work for the capable unemployed. I don't object to a man emigrating if he does so freely. I do object if he is compelled to do so to obtain a livelihood. There should be provision of work for the capable, able-bodied unemployed.

Again, the Labor party feels strongly upon the question of old age pensions. At present the only outlook for the aged is the workhouse.

We have, then, these three immediate items, all of pressing importance: food for the children, work for the strong man, and comfort for the aged poor. I would not have you believe, however, that these sum up our ideals. The bulk of our party is Socialist, and is bound to become ever more socialistic. The Independent Labor party is now holding 2,000 to 2,500 meetings every week, and at every one of them Socialism is the gospel being preached. Its development has seemed marvellous to me.

It is a popular idea that Socialism is only supported by the incompetent, the unfit and the thriftless, and that they want a glorious divide to get a share of other people's savings. As a matter of fact, the most difficult class to convert is the poor. We meet with most success among the well-to-do artisans and have a liberal sprinkling of the educated middle class, while perhaps the greatest surprise of all is that we have two members of the House of Lords Socialists working with us. Socialism is an intellectual movement; it does not appeal to the instincts of the unfit and the incompetent, but to the instincts of the man who loves his fellows and desires to see a truer conception of life prevail than obtains at the present moment. Socialism is not schism; it is humanity, brotherhood. Socialism means that land and industrial capital shall cease to be private property and become public property; that the production of the commodities of life, instead of being carried on to make profits for investors, shall be carried on to meet the requirements of the entire community and for the good of the community as a whole.

Socialism assumes a higher type of humanity. It is not atheism. It does not seek to interfere with a man's religious belief. But I do claim for Socialism—and I challenge dispute—that it is the embodiment of the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount in the everyday business life of the community.

The Socialist movement is growing at home, in Europe, in the United States, and possibly you will find it is growing in Canada. It is an international movement. It means the abolition of war. It will remove the causes that prevent the peoples of the earth from dwelling together in harmony. To the people it means the opening up of a newer and wider and nobler conception of life, and the bringing within the reach of every human being the opportunity of developing the highest and the best of the gifts with which he has been endowed.