

THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

To the Members and Associates of the Fabian Society.

DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

The propaganda of practicable Socialism which the Fabian Society began thirty years ago is now producing results that necessitate by their very success a reconsideration of its methods, having regard to the development of Labor organization and propaganda along independent lines. Thirty years ago the Society took advantage of every opportunity of bringing influence to bear upon organizations and parties of any political colour pending the time when the new Labor organizations it was assisting to form were fully developed. Until lately the fiscal and legislative experiments proposed by the Society have been made mainly in Ireland or Australia, New Zealand or some of the American States. On the Continent of Europe, though Fabian conclusions have often been arrived at, and Fabian proposals made law, notably in Germany and Belgium, Denmark and Hungary, the Society cannot claim to have suggested them; and its influence has been felt chiefly in the increasing conversion of the Social Democratic Movement from a doctrinaire so-called "Marxism" in politics to progressive administrative and legislative reforms. For it is a historical fact that what was called "Revisionism" was very largely Fabianism, carried to Germany from the early meetings of the Fabian Society by the exiles of the Bismarckian persecutions of the eighteen-eighties.

Now, however, our own country, always slow at the uptake, has begun to move, and the Government is becoming more and more involved in vast schemes of social reconstruction, stimulated by Socialist proposals but using every artifice to avoid Socialist conclusions and Socialist principles. Probably the last thing that the present Cabinet expected when it undertook National Insurance as the "safest" piece of conscious Collectivism to begin with, and as the easiest way of staving off the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, was that the ineptitude of the methods that it adopted, and its disregard of such alternatives as were suggested by the Fabian Society, would provoke not a storm, but a steadily rising flood of unpopularity. To regain the votes lost and to hold those jeopardized, the Cabinet has been driven to plunge into the more difficult and even more controversial enterprise of Land Reform and Rural Reconstruction. And it may safely be prophesied that this new step will lead to another. For if it reconciles the electorate to the Liberals, the Opposition will be tempted to outbid the Government by rival schemes, always provided the principle of private ownership is not seriously questioned or the essentials

of capitalist society disputed; and if it only widens the breach made by the Insurance Act, another step forward will again be the only chance of retrieval; whilst at the same time a new impetus will have been given to that spirit of rebellion which is spreading in all Labor organizations.

Meanwhile the work of the Fabian Society has gone on growing in volume and importance without a corresponding increase in membership or income. Its old policy of never asking converts to join its own ranks, indeed of almost driving them away from itself, in order that they might enter the other political and social organizations within their reach, so as to permeate the whole community, had great advantages nationally. But, like all self-denying ordinances, it had its limits in suicide. Resources which the Fabian Society might have held for itself were diverted to the strengthening of Trade Unionism, to the revivifying of the Co-operative Movement, to silent, patient service on Local Governing bodies, to assisting the formation of the Independent Labor Party, and the establishment of a Labor Party in the House of Commons. And the Fabian Society has throughout kept in view the need of bringing people of all classes into Socialist organizations, so that members of the professional classes might find opportunities for taking an active part in the Trade Union and Socialist Movement. Thus it has been the recruiting ground of the middle class Socialist, whom it has been instrumental in passing on to other bodies. Its principal work has been educational; it has in fact constituted the educational and research wing of other national Socialist organizations. Its committees have had a special attraction for brain workers and Civil Servants, whose knowledge is invaluable, but who can contribute more in work than in money; and the Society has not for many years [been independent of the generous subscriptions of its few comparatively rich members. Thus the financial support of the Fabian Society has never been general enough, or wide enough, to enable it even to undertake from day to day all the work that has lain to its hand, still less to make its position secure. The generations that it has educated in Collectivism have, with its own acquiescence, swarmed off into the Independent Labor Party, or gone to lead the Trade Unions or the Co-operative Societies, or thrown themselves into the ranks of the ordinary political parties—to leaven these or be leavened by them, as the case may be; but in either case to pursue a career which the Fabian Society does not pretend to offer them, although it may be that it can qualify them for it perhaps better than any other existing British organization.

The result is, to put it shortly, that the Fabian Society, though still annually growing in membership, feels now the need of more members and more money. The cost of merely preaching Land Reform or Insurance is trifling compared with those of really investigating the problems, providing accurate information and scientifically sound schemes, and dealing critically with actual legislative proposals honeycombed with party superstitions, usually only half understood by the Ministers who put them before the public, and always confused by compromises which have unforeseen and

often disastrous consequences. A Society which has never recruited for itself, never exacted a fixed subscription, never excluded any earnest member unable to pay a subscription at all, never shrunk from retaining as members a considerable number of adherents who could not even repay the expense that their membership involved, and never hesitated to drain the pockets of its membership by appeals for the urgent needs of others, must inevitably succumb unless it is spontaneously supported by those Socialists whose chief interest lies in the educational work for which the Society is particularly adapted. It welcomes their support either as professed Socialist members, or as associates committed only to a general sympathy with the Society's work, or as subscribers committed to nothing but a desire to have its publications.

The Society has recently come to closer grips with the latest problems of the Trade Union Movement, which is at present much perplexed as to the nature of its future organization, and agitated by a renewed spirit of revolt due to a long period of somewhat unsuccessful political experiment. The Society has realized the need for more complete knowledge of the various proposals for improving Trade Union machinery, and for the future control of industry. Its Research Department has been the outcome.

The time has come when the slight, steady increase in the Society's membership year by year no longer suffices for the growing cost of the work. The Society must have both increased subscriptions from its existing membership and increased breadth of support. In short, just as all Labor and Socialist organizations are being stimulated to renewed vigor by the continued Labor unrest—each along their own particular lines of action—so the call of the Fabian Society is for a thousand new members or associates, if possible before March 31st next, so that it may be well equipped to fulfil the growing demands being made upon it for more information and further practical proposals.

Almost every member could bring in more members from among those with whom he or she is brought in contact. An appeal is made to you to do your personal share.

By order of the Executive Committee,

EDW. R. PEASE, Secretary.

FABIAN OFFICE, 3 CLEMENT'S INN,
STRAND, W.C.—CHRISTMAS, 1913.

A Form of Application for Membership is enclosed.

