

Fabian Tract No. 237.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 1931:
A RECORD.

BY

SIDNEY WEBB.

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A RECORD

SIDNEY WELSH

The year 1931 was a year of great change and activity for the Fabian Society. It was a year when the Society's work was carried on in a spirit of unity and cooperation, and when the members were able to do much for the cause of social reform. The Society's work was carried on in a spirit of unity and cooperation, and when the members were able to do much for the cause of social reform.

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

The Fabian Society is a non-party, non-religious, non-sectarian organization which is devoted to the study and promotion of social reform. It was founded in 1884 and has since that time been engaged in a steady and unflinching work for the betterment of the human condition.

PRICE TWO PENCE

This book is published by the Fabian Society, 1, Tavistock Square, London, W.C.1. It is available in paperback and cloth-bound editions. The price is two pence. It is a valuable addition to the library of anyone interested in social reform.

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WHAT HAPPENED IN 1931: A RECORD.

By SIDNEY WEBB.

Now that the year is over it may be worth while putting on record a recital of what will rank as the most remarkable happening in British political history. The fall of the Labour Government after two and a quarter years troubled existence; the instant formation overnight of a new National Government under the same Prime Minister purporting to contain within itself all three political Parties; and finally, at the earliest practicable date, a hurried General Election in which an unprecedented combination of 69 per cent. of the voters elected all but 9 per cent. of the entire House of Commons, thus replacing Parliamentary Government by what is in effect a Party Dictatorship—the whole unfolding within sixty-three days of a single drama, in all its development foreseen in advance, it is safe to say, only by the statesman who was at once its author, its producer, and its principal actor—finds no parallel in anything in the Parliamentary annals of this or any other country. Why did Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, after thirty years upbuilding of the British Labour Party, decide to do his best to smash it, going over with a couple of his principal colleagues, and a mere handful of his Party to a Coalition of Conservatives and Liberals? How did he manage to create such a Coalition, and to place himself at its head? What caused an electoral landslide of such unexampled magnitude? Lastly, what is the significance in British political history, and its consequences to the world, of this unique island drama?

It is unnecessary to dwell on the continual difficulties that have beset the British, like most other European Governments, since the Peace Treaties of 1919—the constant international complications involved alike in reparations and in armaments, the world-wide industrial depression, the catastrophic collapse of prices, the ever-present misery of chronic unemployment, the universal colossal taxation which failed to avert a recurrence of deficits. The Labour Cabinet of 1929—31 stumbled, valiantly but as blindly as other Governments, through its share of these general troubles, aggravated in its own case by the special difficulties inherent in never having a majority in the House of Commons. This meant that the Government was every day dependent on the support of one or other of the inveterately hostile Parties for obtaining the Closure (granted only to a

majority vote), without which not even the routine business of Parliament can be got through, let alone any Government measures embodying party policy. The Labour Party itself grew more and more restive at its own Parliamentary impotence, section after section breaking out in angry rebellion, with practically everybody discontented at the meagre achievements of an over-worked Cabinet whose difficulties were very inadequately realised. The Prime Minister was not in the mood to find time or energy for that friendly social intercourse with the members of his own Party, or even with his Ministerial colleagues, which goes so far to avert friction and produce the "team spirit." More and more he tended to spend his scanty leisure in less disagreeable society. Thus the session of 1931 opened with the Parliamentary Labour Party seriously discontented with itself, the several Ministers out of touch with one another, struggling separately with their departmental difficulties, the Cabinet unable to find solutions for problems in the circumstances actually insoluble, and the back benchers at loggerheads with themselves and with the front bench. The Prime Minister—very much aware of the shortcomings of each one of his colleagues, and of the Party to which he belonged, as well as (may it be said?) perhaps incessantly rather too conscious of his own superiority—was not in a condition to withstand the temptation of flattering suggestions that began to be made from more than one quarter. Why not cut the Gordian Knot by getting rid of the perpetual nuisance of Parliamentary Opposition; especially if such a surgical operation involved also the elimination, or at least the reduction to impotence, of those troublesome sections of the Labour Party whom the Prime Minister had come to loathe with a bitterness that could not be concealed?

The first overt suggestion of a "National Government" absorbing into itself "His Majesty's Opposition"—the constant existence of which had hitherto been accepted as an essential part of that mystic entity the British Constitution—was published early in 1931 by Mr. Garvin, the versatile and forceful Editor of *The Observer*. His object was avowedly to "dish" the existing majority of the House of Commons which obstinately refused to vote for a protective tariff. Twice the issue had been explicitly placed before the British electorate (in 1906, and again in 1923); and each time the policy of fiscal protection had been decisively rejected. Public opinion was, it was thought, now coming round. The agriculturists demanded protection for wheat-growing. The great industry of iron and steel production demanded protection against Belgian and German imports. Many other manufacturers resented what they called

“dumping”—especially by Soviet Russia (meaning usually no more than the competition of cheaper commodities). There was a growing demand for fiscal “preferences” to Dominion products, involving the imposition of duties on foodstuffs and raw materials from the United States and Argentina. In despair of any remedy for the chronic business slump and the long continued unemployment, even the merchants, the bankers and the shipowners, joined occasionally by some of the Trade Unions, began to hanker after what seemed the easy solution of excluding, or at any rate restricting foreign imports of manufactured goods. As many as nine-tenths of the Conservative members of the House of Commons became eager for a protectionist tariff, and they were half-heartedly joined by a few of the Liberals. Yet their leaders were afraid to put the proposal explicitly to the electors, who had decisively rejected it only eight years before. It began to be whispered among ardent protectionists themselves that only by the magic spell of a “National Government” evoking the patriotic emotion of the whole people, could the inherited popular distrust of “food taxes” be overcome and a policy of fiscal protection made politically practicable. Already in June 1931 it was said privately that September 1931 would see such a Government.

Meanwhile the Government finances were seen to be getting into a bad way. Already in February 1931 the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Philip Snowden) had publicly warned the House of Commons that the decline in revenue combined with the increase in expenditure was creating financial difficulty. Nevertheless, in presenting his Budget three months later, he avoided any considerable increase in taxation, and proposed no substantial reductions of expenditure, filling the gap by the appropriation to revenue of certain cash balances which it had become unnecessary to maintain, and by the continuance of the policy of borrowing for the Unemployment Insurance Fund which had been begun and continued by the preceding Conservative Government. It was, as events subsequently demonstrated, an extremely faulty Budget; excusable only by the grave state of health of the Chancellor who, with indomitable courage, had framed it from a sick bed, whilst suffering acutely from an internal disorder. The apprehended deficit very quickly became a certainty. The Hoover Moratorium of inter-governmental debts, cordially accepted by Great Britain, alone cost the Government 11 million pounds on the year's account, whilst the continued increase of unemployment and the short-fall of revenue consequent on the slump in trade greatly widened the gap. What the Prime Minister deemed most serious was, however, not so much the

prospective deficit itself as the chronic drain on the national finances involved in the continued maintenance of nearly three million unemployed workers (and their families) at a cost of some 120 million pounds a year. Yet how could the Labour Party, or indeed any one party, venture to propose suddenly to cut off the pay-roll so large a proportion of the electorate? The idea of a National Government, as a means, not of adopting a policy of fiscal protection, but of cutting out this dangerous "overgrowth" from the body politic seems to have been germinating in the Prime Minister's mind for months before the blow was struck. One great obstacle was the Liberal Party. How could that party, itself desperately fearing a General Election in which its absolute extinction was more than probable, be induced to merge itself in a three-party coalition, inevitably leading up to just such a popular judgment?

Curiously enough it was the Liberal Party itself that unwittingly brought on the fateful crisis. Regardless of the party's previous requisitions on the Government for enormous expenditure on public works to employ the unemployed, the whole party chose suddenly to demand of the Government the immediate appointment of a non-political Royal Commission of business men, which, in order to lighten the burden that the heavy taxation was declared to be pressing on industry, should summarily suggest drastic reductions in public expenditure. The Conservative Party, eager to join in a defeat of the Government on any issue, promised unanimous support. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in order to avert parliamentary defeat, somewhat contemptuously accepted the resolution, and appointed a three-party Commission of six bankers, accountants and manufacturers, under Sir George May, who had recently retired from the administration of the colossal Prudential Insurance Company. That Commission, going rapidly to work, produced by the end of July, 1931, a startling report, recommending (by a majority of 5 to 2) the instant striking-off of 96 million pounds of expenditure, over two-thirds of it from Unemployment Insurance, and most of the balance by summary reductions of pay (actually in breach of contracts individually entered into) of the school teachers; the local police forces; the Army, Navy and Air Force; the Health Insurance doctors and pharmacists; the Civil Service; and, finally, the judges and the Ministers themselves. In addition, the other expenditure on Public Health, on secondary and university education, on colonial development and on all forms of scientific research was to be cut down to a minimum. On the publication of this report, which experienced administrators felt to be both ignorantly framed and

ill-judged in many of its proposals, a great newspaper clamour arose, voicing the demand of the taxpayer for some such reduction of his burden; leaders of both the Conservative and Liberal Parties made it known that they would unite to defeat the Government on this popular cry; and the Cabinet at once took the matter seriously into consideration.

It happened, however, that this purely domestic and parliamentary crisis, which might have been surmounted by some ingenuity, as others had been, coincided with a second, and a more serious emergency of a different nature, and one not at once revealed to the public. In July, 1931, the Bank of England suddenly warned the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer of an alarming foreign drain of gold, caused by a steady withdrawal of the current balances and short term deposits which foreign governments, bankers and merchants had gradually accumulated in London, in the hands, mainly, of a few dozen of financial houses, to an amount of which (as each transaction was kept secret) the magnitude was unknown, either to the Government, or to the Bank of England, or even to any of the financial houses themselves, but which had lately been estimated at some 400 million pounds. In the ordinary course of business a large and equally unknown proportion of this sum had been lent on short terms, at relatively high rates of interest, to manufacturers and bankers in various continental countries, from whom it was proving difficult, and in many cases impossible to recall it without bringing down the whole fabric of German and Austrian credit. The London financial houses were very far from being insolvent, but their only resource in the emergency was to draw gold from the Bank of England, in exchange for currency. The resulting drain on the gold reserve, held for the quite different purpose of securing the fiduciary note issue, was so serious that the Bank had already borrowed in July from New York and Paris no less than 50 million pounds, which was rapidly disappearing. Early in August the Bank represented that unless the British Government itself borrowed, within a few days, 80 millions more in dollars and francs, to maintain the gold reserve, it would be necessary for the Government to declare a moratorium for the whole City of London, with calamitous results to credit, international as well as national, all the world over. No question was raised as to the possibility of going off the gold standard, a step then apparently regarded as unthinkable. The Labour Government sought accordingly, through the Bank of England, to borrow from New York—Paris being in close association—whatever the situation temporarily needed. The application was met by two requirements

stated to be necessary to "restore the confidence" without which, as it was stated, no such loan could be obtained. First, that the British Government Budget should be honestly balanced without recourse to other than this merely temporary borrowing, with the support in Parliament of the Opposition leaders; and secondly, that very substantial economies in Government expenditure should be instantly effected, notably as regards the cost of Unemployment Insurance. That this second stipulation was made has been denied; and the official denial is doubtless accurate in the sense that the stipulation was not put in the form of an ultimatum, or of any explicit claim to interfere with the British Government's own business. Doubtless the response of the New York bankers was not only courteous but sympathetic and even friendly in tone. But the Prime Minister himself has since said (in answer to a question in the House of Commons, and as a reason why the cut in the rate of Unemployment Benefit could not be cancelled) that this was "a condition of the borrowing," and must therefore be maintained. At any rate the Labour Cabinet, which had already unanimously determined to balance the Budget by immediately imposing the necessary additional taxation and by making any prudent economies, refused to accept any such "condition of the borrowing" as Mr. MacDonald has described, and late on Sunday evening, 23rd August, in order not to render urgent public business impossible, empowered the Prime Minister to tender to the King his own resignation, which automatically includes the termination of office of the whole Ministry. It was taken for granted that the King would immediately send for Mr. Baldwin, the leader of the Conservative Party, and entrust him with the formation of a new Government. It is significant that Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who as Mr. Baldwin's principal colleague had been with him almost hourly in consultation with the Prime Minister, stated publicly in a speech a few days later that he had himself gone to bed that Sunday night with exactly that assumption.

The Prime Minister had in mind a different development of the drama that he himself had staged. What happened at Buckingham Palace on Monday morning, 24th August, can be known only to the actual participators. What is said is that the King, with whom the Prime Minister had been in constant communication but who never went outside his constitutional position, made a strong appeal to him to stand by the nation in this financial crisis, and to seek the support of leading members of the Conservative and Liberal Parties in forming, in conjunction with such members of his own Party as would come in, a united National Government. The King is believed to have made

a correspondingly strong appeal to the Liberal and Conservative leaders. What is known is that Mr. MacDonald came at noon to the final Labour meeting, and at once informed his astonished colleagues that, whilst they were all out of office owing to his resignation, he had actually "kissed hands" as Prime Minister of a National Government, which would confine itself to what was required to meet the actual financial crisis and would then promptly proceed to a General Election, at which the leaders of the three political parties, without anything in the nature of a coalition or a "coupon," would severally appeal to their respective followers. The new Government thus formed proved to consist, in the Cabinet, of four Labour Ministers (Philip Snowden, J. H. Thomas and Lord Sankey, following the Prime Minister), four Conservatives and two Liberals. Meetings of the Conservative and Liberal Parties promptly endorsed the action of their respective leaders, and half-a-dozen Liberals and a dozen Conservatives accepted minor ministerial office. A meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party, which Mr. MacDonald did not even attend, much less appeal to, refused unanimously to condone what it regarded as a gross betrayal, aggravated by a long course of exclusion of his colleagues from his counsel and policy. Only three of the Labour Ministers outside the Cabinet (together with the Prime Minister's son) accepted minor ministerial office in the new Government; whilst all but about 5 per cent. of the Labour members, and all but about 4 per cent. of the chosen Labour candidates, steadfastly adhered to Mr. Henderson, who was elected leader of the Party.

There was a note of irony in the immediate result. Withdrawals of balances from London, and the drain of gold from the Bank of England, continued unabated, and presently became a heavy spate—thus demonstrating that they were caused, not by any lack of confidence in Britain's Government, but by apprehensions of a run on the banks in nearly every other country! Within four weeks of the formation of the National Government, it found itself compelled summarily to prohibit the issue and the export of any more gold. On September 21st, London was "off the Gold Standard!" Far from this "terrible calamity" proving instantly ruinous to British credit or British trade, as Mr. MacDonald had so recently threatened, the Press welcomed it; and Manchester reported an immediate fillip in the exports of textile goods, a fillip presently felt in other export markets.

Meanwhile there was proceeding a short and excited session of Parliament, in which the new Ministry had found its claim to be, in any accustomed sense, a National Government, definitely rebutted by the presence, only slightly diminished in numbers,

of His Majesty's Opposition under Mr. Henderson. But by reason of the close alliance of the whole Conservative and Liberal Parties, with the 15 deserters from the Labour Party, the Government carried every vote by a majority of about 60. It rapidly put through the new Budget, showing taxation increased and expenditure reduced in a way to secure a surplus both for 1931-2 and 1932-3. It put through equally rapidly an "Economies Bill" on the lines of the May Report which, by a momentous and unprecedented change of constitutional practice, did not specify the economies to be made, but empowered the several Ministers to effect them in their own Departments, *with such arbitrary "modifications" of existing contracts as were required*, merely by ministerial fiat (for this, indeed, is what an order of His Majesty in Council has long meant). Such a device, adopted to avoid parliamentary debate, or even specific submission to the House of Commons of the proposed changes, may, one day, be made use of for a much greater revolution "in due course of law." The very day the Bill was passed Parliament was dissolved and writs were issued for a General Election within three weeks.

The election campaign of these three weeks was a political whirlwind without parallel in British annals. The Liberal and Conservative organisations in nearly every constituency promptly united, and resolutely closed their ranks against every candidate who did not run in support of the National Government. A regular plan of acting on the "fear complex" to which nearly everyone is subject, seems to have been determined upon. Practically the whole newspaper press of the country, with the outstanding exceptions of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Herald*, kept up the same appeal to the 30 million electors to help the National Government to save the State from vaguely suggested perils of the most awful nature. The broadcasting service, a piece of Governmental machinery, was, without any nice regard to fairness between the combatants, used day after day to immense effect, the air becoming thick with all manner of insinuations aimed at producing panic among the indiscriminating electors. Yet the crisis *had* been surmounted. The desired "economies" had been effected, and the Budget austere balanced by additional taxation. There was thus no immediate financial menace. A new cause for panic was, however, promptly found in the "adverse balance" of the nation's trade, which no sound economist believes that any Government action could immediately affect, and which would anyhow be in due course automatically adjusted as one of the results of going off the Gold Standard. Nevertheless the "adverse balance of trade" was declared to be a

menace to the value of sterling at home. The currency was in danger of becoming valueless. The pound might sink to be worth no more than ten shillings, than one shilling, than a penny. No man's wages were safe from depreciation. The Labour Government, if it had not been turned out, would not have had money after November to pay the Unemployment Insurance Benefit. The climax was reached in statements repeated far and wide of something that the Labour Government had done or would do to the three hundred millions deposited by ten millions of people in the Post Office Savings Bank, which might be used to pay the unemployed. Nothing new had, in fact, been done or had ever been contemplated in connection with these savings, and this was well known to those who spread the alarming rumours. Yet the rumour actually produced a slight run on the Post Office Savings Bank. In the last hours before polling day millions of poor folk, the safety of whose little hoards seemed to be at stake, became scared though of what they knew not, and rushed to the polling stations which many of these had never troubled to visit before. When the ballot boxes were opened it was found that these subterranean streams of fear had undermined the electoral foundations of nearly every candidate, whatever his particular shade of politics, who was not a professed supporter of the so-called National Government. Such a landslide of votes no country had ever seen. Some 69 per cent. of all the voters, representing an unprecedented combination of all parts of the Kingdom, all political parties, all religious denominations, all vocations, all social grades and especially both sexes, simply annihilated the various "New Parties" and swept away four-fifths of His Majesty's Opposition, electing no less than 91 per cent. of the whole House of Commons in support of Mr. MacDonald's new Ministry.

What manner of Ministry is it, to which the destiny of Britain has thus hysterically been entrusted? It is, at any rate for the moment, not a Party Government because, even after its reconstitution, it includes prominent representatives of different Parties, although the regular Conservative Party now counts 470 members out of 615, and claims to furnish 94 per cent. of the Government's supporters in the House of Commons. A mixed contingent of Liberals hold office, but have only 50-odd followers in Parliament, split into two warring sections. The seceders from the Labour Party (who have been formally excluded from that Party) include the Prime Minister and half-a-dozen other Ministers, who are nearly equalled in numbers by the tiny handful of their Party supporters in the House of Commons. A Government so constituted and supported can hardly fail to be,

in substance, a Government of the Conservative Party. It was at the outset a Government without a policy, pledged only to do what it found to be the best for the nation. Within three weeks it was putting through measures (including fiscal protection and a gradual starvation of the social services) substantially in accord with the policy of the Conservative Party. The Government will, in fact, before the expiry of the term of the new Parliament, inevitably become Conservative through and through, either through gradual extrusion of the alien elements or by their complete assimilation.

What is the significance of this whole drama, with its *finale* of such an extraordinary election, in British political history? The first thing to notice is that the Labour Party, more than ever definitely Socialist in policy, is not "smashed," but rather consolidated and purified. Not all the skill with which the adverse combination was manœuvred—not all the force of the appeal to national emotion—availed to break the mass vote for Labour cast by the electorate. In October 1931, as it is beginning to be ruefully observed, allowing for the uncontested seats, no fewer than 7 millions voted for Socialism against some 16 millions for the Anti-Socialist union. At the preceding election (1929), the corresponding figures were 8 million and 13 million odd. It was merely the disunion among the Anti-Socialists that had put the Labour Party in office in 1929. Their union against Socialism was bound to come; and with it the end of any Minority Government. It is an accidental result of the British single member constituency that a decline in the votes cast for the Labour Party from 36 to 30 per cent. of the whole should involve a loss of no fewer than 215 seats. Of these at least 130 were seen to be gone as soon as the Liberals and Conservatives determined on union against Labour. What was swept away at this election can, just as suddenly, be reinstated at another. The remaining 85 losses, together with the exceptional magnitude of the local majorities, measure the success of the Prime Minister's astute playing upon the "fear complex" of the electorate.

Another comment on the electoral result is that perhaps for the first time in British history, a very large number of women must have voted differently from the men. In the early experience of Woman Suffrage, alike in the United States and in Australasia, it was the common opinion that the women always "voted with their menkind," whether fathers, husbands, brothers or lovers, thus making little perceptible difference to the result. No doubt the grey mare was sometimes the better horse, and the family man voted with the family woman; but the effect was the

same. On the Continent of Europe, in certain districts of Belgium, Germany, and Austria, in which Roman Catholicism is very strong, a majority of the women electors have sometimes been estimated to have voted in opposition to a majority of the men. In Great Britain, in 1931, for the first time, the women electors are considered to have voted differently from the men, and to have contributed to the National Government majority, in a much greater percentage than the men. A combination of patriotism and apprehension as to the safety of their little hoards of savings, certainly sent an unusual proportion of women electors to the poll, many of them for the first time. There has been no concealment of the fact that, in thousands of cases, they voted out of fear.

Finally it may be said that the whole episode is a manifestation, which the world will not fail to note, and which the British Labour Party must duly heed, of the extraordinary strength of the position of the British capitalist system and the British governing class. The capitalist system may show signs of breaking up. But let its elements combine and marshal to one end all their various forces; and their fortress is, in any particular contest, almost impregnable. Their automatically acquired wealth; their positions of vantage as employers or landlords; their command of very nearly the whole newspaper press and of the ability of our most capable cartoonists; their hordes of dependants, in the shopkeeping and professional classes no less than in domestic servants and other employees, and the immense technical ability by which they are served—all this counts more and more at the polls as electioneering becomes more scientific and more expensive, just as it does in any serious industrial conflict. But all these influences are helped at the parliamentary end by the social policy that has, for the past century, been almost instinctively followed by the British governing class, in its relation to any emerging personality, of whatever antecedents, in whom can be recognised the potentiality of power. Popular leaders are no longer ruthlessly suppressed when they are too ambitious to be bought off by anything less than parliamentary leadership. The British governing class cannot now punish *scandalum magnatum*; and corruption in its cruder forms has become repugnant to it. Far more tempting treatment is, almost automatically, and even out of genuine kindness, now meted out. The emerging leaders of the common people are neither pilloried nor bribed. As soon as they show evidence of political power, they are embraced! It took some time to make Disraeli the beloved of duchesses. Joseph Chamberlain, Radical, Republican and Municipal Socialist was more

quickly assimilated. On more recent cases it is needless to dwell. Nor will these be the last. The willingness to use the weapon of seduction will be the last ditch in the defensive position of the British rentier class.

Meanwhile the shock that the Labour Party has received by the magnitude of its defeat may be expected to do it good. The Party is still only a quarter-of-a-century old, and its growth in that time to nearly one-third of the nation is little short of marvellous. But its representatives in Parliament have been, as we can now see, injuriously affected by what were only accidental successes. In being called as a minority to ministerial office in 1924, and again in 1929, merely through disunion among its opponents, the Labour Party was, as its members now realise, prematurely born into governmental life. It had never come near comprising a majority of the nation. At no election, not even at that of 1929, did it obtain the support at the polls of a majority of the wage-earning voters. Most of its parliamentary representatives have found it difficult, in their inexperience, to rid themselves of the mental habits of a lifelong oppositor to the powers that be, whilst some of them have seemed almost to regret the chance that has put them, for a time, among those powers. Nor can the Labour Party, in this generation of mediocrities, be said to have yet found, any more than its Liberal and Conservative opponents, the high statesmanship, or even the amount of governmental talent, required to cope with the recurring crises of the present century. The Labour Party has now the opportunity, during the next few years, of (1) applying itself continuously to the ubiquitous educational propaganda by which alone it can double the number of its adherents; (2) of quietly working out in greater detail its constructive programme, without prematurely committing itself as a Party to any but general principles; (3) of steadily accustoming the public to one item after another in that programme by the publication of an incessant stream, not only of popular pamphlets, but also of books, lectures and articles in the weeklies and monthlies by individual members; and last but not least, (4) of seeking to develop, within the Party itself, much more of that friendly social intercourse among fellow-workers in a common cause which so effectively promotes its success.

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

11 DARTMOUTH STREET, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W.1.

Those willing to join the Labour Party, or desirous of obtaining information about its Programme and Principles, are invited to communicate with the Secretary of the Fabian Society.

The Fabian Society has been, from the outset, a constituent body of the Labour Party; and membership of the Society carries with it full membership of the Labour Party; eligibility for nomination to all Conferences and Offices, and qualification for Labour Party candidatures for Parliament and Local Authorities, without obligation to belong to any other organisation.

The Society welcomes as members any persons, men or women, wherever resident, who subscribe to its Basis (set forth below), and who will co-operate in its work according to their opportunities.

BASIS OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

(TO BE SIGNED BY ALL MEMBERS.)

(Adopted May 23rd, 1919.)

The Fabian Society consists of Socialists.

It therefore aims at the reorganisation of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit. In this way only can the natural and acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the whole people.

The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in land, with equitable consideration of established expectations, and due provision as to the tenure of the home and the homestead; for the transfer to the community, by constitutional methods, of all such industries as can be conducted socially; and for the establishment, as the governing consideration in the regulation of production, distribution and service, of the common good instead of private profit.

The Society is a constituent of the Labour Party and of the International Socialist Congress; but it takes part freely in all constitutional movements, social, economic and political, which can be guided towards its own objects. Its direct business is (a) the propaganda of Socialism in its application to current problems; (b) investigation and discovery in social, industrial, political and economic relations; (c) the working out of Socialist principles in legislation and administrative reconstruction; (d) the publication of the results of its investigations and their practical lessons.

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The Society includes:—

- I. Members, who must sign the Basis and be elected by the Committee. Their Subscriptions are not fixed; each is expected to subscribe annually according to his means. They control the Society through the Executive Committee (elected annually by ballot through a postal vote), and at its annual and other business meetings.
- II. Associates, who sign a form expressing only general sympathy with the objects of the Society and pay not less than 10s. a year. They can attend all except the exclusively members' meetings, but have no control over the Society and its policy.
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- (i.) Free lectures by its members and officers;
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- (iii.) Answers to Questions from Members of Local Authorities and others on legal, technical or political matters of Local Government, etc.;
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