

CREATIVE SOCIALISM

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BY

E. TOWNSHEND



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TO MY FRIEND
ODON POR
FROM WHOM
COMES ANYTHING OF VALUE
IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES

PREFACE

THIS little book is the outcome of an attempt to rescue for English readers an unpublished essay on the meaning and purpose of Syndicalism. It was written early in 1913 by Mr. Odon Por for a Socialist Magazine which was to have been published in England but which never materialised. The attempt to revive the essay in its original form proved impracticable. So much water had run under the bridges since 1913 that an entirely new statement was needed. Syndicalism, moreover, in England had never been a really live issue.

It is very significant that towards the close of the nineteenth century, when the dry bones of Socialism began to be moved upon by a new spirit, the reaction of Labour in England was markedly different from its reaction on the continent and in America. In England Trade Unionism was gaining in strength and vitality, a gain of which the great Dock strike of 1889 was both cause and effect, but it showed no sign of altering in function. The success of the Unions made them all the more determined to proceed along the old lines of

wresting better conditions from their employers, but, with this end in view, they turned their attention more and more to political methods.

The starting of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 marked a definite advance in that direction, an advance which has culminated, thirty years later, in a Labour Party actually in office.

The founders of the I.L.P. must have recognised that they owed their growing strength to industrial action yet they were not impelled to carry industrial action to its logical conclusion. The industrial revolution, in this country had seated the Capitalist too firmly in the saddle. The creative impulse, which was the mainspring of Latin syndicalism had no chance under such an incubus while a traditional confidence in Parliament and a reformed franchise led them to pin their faith, like the Chartists before them, to political action. Keir Hardie and his friends, notwithstanding their splendid enthusiasm for the new party, were true democrats of the Liberal stamp with a profound belief in representative government.

In France and in Italy conditions were different; the logic of events less obscured. Ancient landmarks in custom, character and institutions had not been so completely swept away by the industrial flood, while, on the

other hand Government had been feebler and more corrupt, so that trust in the State—or if one prefers to call it so—a servile attitude towards the State, had not arisen.

And so it came to pass that English Labour, in the grip of High Finance, could do nothing but invoke State aid in fighting the profiteer, while Latin Labour jumped at once to the logical conclusion that the way to get the better of him was to do without him; a conclusion that found spontaneous expression in Syndicalism.

It would of course be untrue to say that Syndicalism was unknown in England. It grew up vigorously enough among the Welsh miners and found able exponents there while Tom Mann carried on a wide and active propaganda. Still it struck no roots in the Trade Union world nor did it cause the thinkers of the Fabian Society to swerve by a hairsbreadth from their collectivist creed.

This little book is an attempt, not to champion Syndicalism, but to show that the spirit that lay behind it is the one and only force that can reconstruct Society.

E. TOWNSHEND.

*Wimbledon,
July 1924.*

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE CREATIVE SPIRIT	I
II.	CAPITALISM MUST BE SUPERSEDED	11
III.	THE REFORMIST ATTITUDE <i>Morris</i>	23
IV.	GUILD SOCIALISM . . . <i>Bentley</i>	48
V.	THE REBIRTH OF PROFESSIONAL CONSCIOUS- NESS	65
VI.	PROFESSIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS AN AGENT OF REVOLUTION	83
VII.	ENCROACHING CONTROL	92
VIII.	THE NEW INCENTIVE	102
IX.	HOW FAR CAN POLITICAL POWER FORWARD REVOLUTION?	114
X.	CONCLUSION	126

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