

THE ABERDEEN Labour Elector

A WEEKLY RECORD OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT.

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The present Aberdeen Town Council is an interesting study, because it is the only body of the kind in the United Kingdom in which the Labour interest is the dominant force. The following analysis of its membership will show pretty well how the land lies in this respect.

Class I.—Labour members, *i.e.*, members of the Independent Labour Party pledged to its programme *in toto* :—Bisset, Johnston, Glass, Beveridge, Gray—5.

Class II.—Members who may be relied on in most cases to vote with the Labour members :—Simpson, Farquhar, Wilkie, Young, Henderson, Skinner, Hugh Macdonald, Scott, M'Kenzie—9.

Class III.—Members who may be relied on to vote against the Labour members on all vital points (men who should be knocked out neck and crop at the earliest opportunity) :—Lord Provost Stewart, Kemp, Byres, Pope, Collie, Reid, Edwards—7.

Class IV.—Doubtfuls and Squeezables (chiefly, though not exclusively, men without ideas) :—Bain, Farquharson, Taylor, Maitland, Sinclair, Hutton, Gordon, Lyon, Mearns, Dean of Guild Macdonald, Robertson—11

From this analysis it appears that in most cases of a critical division the Labour Party is likely to bring at least 14 votes into the field, *i.e.*, just 2 less than a majority of the Council. It follows, therefore, that as long as Class II. is not alienated, the Labour strength is much greater than might at first be supposed.

This is very clearly shown by the enormous influence exercised in the council by Treasurer Bisset, who is practically recognised as Labour leader. It is no exaggeration to say that he "bosses the show." This is no doubt due largely to his personal characteristics, such as his ready resource, and his power of beating the Philistines on their own ground, *viz.* business capacity, but mainly it is due to the knowledge that he can command more votes than any other individual in the Council.

An amusing instance of his power even in trifles occurred the other day when Baillie Simpson voted by mistake in the wrong side, and the Lord Provost ruled that the record of his vote could not be altered. The Baillie remarked that this was hard, but proposed to acquiesce in the Provost's ruling. Then the Treasurer rose, and, fixing the Provost with his eye, declared that he questioned the correctness of his ruling—as being contrary to the practice of the House of Commons. The Lord Provost hurriedly muttered

something, inaudible at a distance, and directed the Clerk to alter the Baillie's vote. "By George!" exclaimed a Labour member, "what a change is here since before November!"

It is important to note that while the Labour Party is strong in the Council it depends largely for its strength on men who are not sound upon, and do not understand the paramount importance of, the labour problem. Hence, the genuine Labour members should take the greatest care not to allow themselves to be imperceptibly merged in the general mass of Councillors, so as to lose sight, even for a moment, of the primary object for which they have been sent to the Council Board. That object must be consistently pressed forward, regardless of the feelings of either friend or foe.

The fear has been expressed that the Labour members may not hang together well. So far as we can judge by the last few weeks experience this fear will prove groundless. It is difficult, no doubt, to hold together a group of men all of pretty strong characters and personalities and who are all thoroughly in earnest. But they clearly recognise that they are necessary to one another, and that any disintegration will be visited with severe censure and punishment by those of the outside public who are interested in the Labour cause.

The difficulty of getting a clear and categorical statement from a member of the Gladstonian government on the Eight Hours question is doubtless well known to our readers. The latest utterance on the subject from that quarter is probably unique. Sir John Rigby, Solicitor-General for England, was returned for Forfarshire by the votes of the ploughmen. Naturally, they expect a *quid pro quo*. A meeting of the Ploughmen's Union, recently held at Arbroath, sent a list of their demands to Sir John, including, among others, one for an Eight Hours Bill. "The ploughmen should carefully consider"—so runs the answer—"whether in *asking* for legislation in their favour on this point" (the Eight Hours day) "they are not probably risking other and more likely legislative improvements."

Sir John Rigby has the reputation of being a great constitutional lawyer, and he is probably in the habit of weighing his words. At any rate we will pay him the compliment of believing that he means what he says. According to the Solicitor-General, then, it is a dangerous thing in a class of men to ask for an Eight Hours Bill. What does his covert threat imply? One of two things