

OUR HISTORY - 68

Clifford Allen - Socialism And The Next Labour Government (1925)

Clifford Allen was leader of the Independent Labour Party. A Fabian at Cambridge University, in 1912 he became President of the University Socialist Federation. Allen was general manager and then editor of the Labour Party's Daily Citizen. In 1914, he took an anti-war position and helped to form the No-Conscription Fellowship, of which he became President. A conscientious objector, he was imprisoned several times and his health never fully recovered. After the war he was active in the guild socialist movement and appointed ILP treasurer, becoming chairman in 1923. In this role he was active in the Labour and Socialist Union which in May 1923 had reunited with the Vienna Union (or Two and a Half International) of which the ILP had been a member. Allen was to resign as ILP chair in October 1925, as the ILP became dominated by James Maxton and his group of Glasgow MPs. Allen had worked closely with Ramsay MacDonald and supported MacDonald when he formed the National Government in August 1931. He was rewarded with a peerage and was subsequently one of the founders of the cross-party Next Five Years group working with the young Harold MacMillan and Alfred Barratt Brown of Ruskin College to support national economic planning. As a pacifist, he was active in the League of Nations Union and the National Peace Council and in 1938 a supporter of Neville Chamberlain's attempts to avoid war with Germany. A biography of Allen, *The Open Conspirator*, was published by Arthur



Marwick in 1964. In the following year, a collection of his writings and correspondence was published under the title *Plough my Own Furrow* by Martin Gilbert:

"It is quite legitimate to assert that mankind is too selfish, too foolish, too cruel, too cynical for any speedy attempt to change its manner of life, or to replace suffering with happiness. For all I know that may be true, but we at least, cannot succumb to the council of despair. Is it entirely false or foolish to suggest that we happen by some favoured chance to be living at the moment when one stage of civilisation has exhausted itself, and when science and education demand rapid and immediate changes? If this be so, we can only fulfil our duty by accepting the situation forced upon us. We shall reject every political method but that of submitting to democracy the policy in which we believe. I think this favourable chance would not have come in one generation were it not for the hazard our leaders took when the Labour government was formed. The ultimate value of that bold decision depends on the use to which we now put the opportunity thus created. It may be that those who think in this way have no right to win a hearing in the world of practical politics, but at least we will declare our belief that Socialism could be accepted by this nation within our lifetime. Such a policy will require from us an utter rejection of all interest in politics as a means to personal power; it will involve a life of personal sincerity, which is not often found in the politics of any party; it will, above all things, require charity between ourselves." **C**

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