

CHAPTER V

THE ELECTIONS OF 1922

THE year 1921 had been a period of strenuous activity in the local life of Poplar. Its successor was to show how far the local electors approved of what had been done, and whether they were prepared to support the Labour Party in going forward with its programme. In the first week of the new year the Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance (the combined organisation of the local Liberals and Tories) commenced a campaign of misrepresentation and abuse by weekly articles in the local press, which were later reprinted as leaflets and distributed broadcast in the Borough.

These local Rip-van-Winkles had evidently slumbered pretty soundly during the whole of the excitement of 1921, for the first article of January 3rd, 1922, commenced in the following strain:

"How are we to overcome the apathy and sleepy sickness which have fallen like a pall upon the constituency? . . . Is it not time we were up and doing? Life in the Borough is earnest, the times are urgent, and we need real good Municipal Government. . . . Let every man be fully persuaded of his duty to his fellow man. Let us clear the decks for action."

So, week by week, until the Guardians' Elections on April 5th, they carried on their scurrilous campaign. The Labour Representatives were the "spendthrifts who had brought about the present chaotic conditions." "Business firms will remove their works, lock, stock and barrel, away from the poisonous maladministration of the Socialist Labour Party." "Hundreds of thousands of pounds are expended to give relief to those who find it more advantageous to be idle than to work."

A special appeal was made to women electors. "You will see that you do *not* put a X against the names of those who have brought humiliation on the manhood of the Borough." The men had evidently made a very bad job of electing local councillors, but the women would put all right. "You can win Poplar for us and enable us again to hold up our heads." "You mothers can alter it and bring about a clean state of things."

The Labour Party was represented as working by cunning, underground methods to bring about deliberately a state of chaos, regardless of what suffering that might mean to women and children. "They want to WRECK LOCAL GOVERNMENT with REVOLUTION IN THE OFFING." Nothing seemed too bad to say, no motive too gross to impute to men and women who, in the most difficult circumstances, had striven to serve the best interests of the people of Poplar. "They are so intoxicated with unaccustomed power, and the use of other people's money, that they stagger as they deliberate and become incoherent as they slyly encourage (whilst appearing to challenge) the exorbitant demands of their petitioners."