

# THE RED FLAG

A Journal of News and Views Devoted to the Interests of the Working Class

VOL. 1 NO. 37

VANCOUVER, B. C., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1919

FIVE CENTS

## PROFESSOR LEACOCK RIDDLED

*His Straw Socialism Exposed*

"WHO is there," says Professor Leacock, "that has not turned at times from the fever and fret of the world we live in, from the spectacle of its wasted energy, its wild frenzy of work and its bitter inequality, to the land of dreams, to the pictured vision of the world as it might be."

"This vision," continues the professor, "is the outcome of that divine discontent which raises man above his environment."

Divine Fiddlesticks! This practice of attributing the cause of certain observed phenomena to the interposition of a "divine" something or other is feeble enough in all conscience even in those cases where the sought for cause is not evident. But in such an instance as quoted above it becomes rank nonsense. If the professor is really concerned with discovering the cause of the vision he refers to, he need look no further than his own opening sentence. This "vision" of a better state of affairs to which the professor refers is very aptly so described. It is a vision, a mental vision. It is something which, so far as we know, has never existed save in its mental visionary form. It is an idea, an ideal, and as such is the direct outcome, the reflex; not of any "divine discontent," whatever that may be, but of those very material conditions which, in the professor's own words, are a complex of "wasted energy," "wild frenzy of work" and "bitter inequality." Such a vision experienced by a few isolated individuals might be the outcome of a disordered mind or an overworked stomach. But a vision as widespread as the one in question is admitted to be a social vision, a social ideal, and forecasts just such a social movement as the professor has ere this, in an unguarded moment, perhaps, ventured to interpolate in the light of the Materialistic Interpretation of History.

We are inclined to be indulgent toward Mr. Leacock. He is better known to us as humorist than as a sociologist, and we feel free to confess to a fondness for his quaint humor, traces of which we seem to discern in some of his remarks

### For the Defence

A Mass Meeting will be held in the Avenue Theatre, Main Street, Vancouver, on Tuesday, Oct. 7, at 8 p.m. Johns, Bray and Pritchard will be the speakers.

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on economics. But this "divine discontent" stuff is beyond a joke.

It would seem that in this fifth chapter of his series, in which he at last comes to close grips with what he apparently imagines to be Socialism. Professor Leacock is more than ever inclined to merge the professor of economics in the writer of short stories. No small part of the art of the fictionist is the writing of euphonious nothings, smoothly flowing sentences and well-rounded periods which mean—nothing. "The earlier Socialism," says the professor, "was a plan to make all poor together. Modern Socialism is a plan to make all rich together." This certainly sounds very nice. It is just the sort of epigrammatic utterance which certain types of writers so delight in. But does it mean anything? If it correctly describes the old Socialism and the new, then the difference which Mr. Leacock seems to see between them does not exist. If he had given the matter just a little thought he would have seen that "rich" and "poor" are relative terms, that there can be no poor without rich, and no rich without poor, any more than there can be a north without a south, or a south without a north, or a top without a bottom, or a left without a right. So that obviously if all the members of society were on a level financially there would be no rich and no poor, and thus the good professor's statement turns out to be utter nonsense.

Apparently Mr. Leacock desires to create the impression that the Socialists propose to reduce all the members of society to a dead, monotonous level. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In the first place the Socialists do not propose to reorganize society in any way. They do, however, predict that the time is close at hand when society will be compelled to reorganize itself. And they hope that, when that reorganization has taken place, those "bitter inequalities," which even Professor Leacock can not bring himself to deny, will be conspicuous by their absence. They are confident, moreover, that if society is sufficiently informed as to the causes of those "inequalities" that the reorganization will indeed have the effect they hope for. Consequently, the Socialists stand for the fullest and widest dissemination of knowledge concerning social laws and phenomena. Professor Leacock, judging by his efforts to date, is disposed to hinder rather than to help in this. For reasons best known to himself he does not think the public are to be trusted with the truth.

After telling us that the "vision" which he conceives to be Socialism is the outcome of "divine discontent," the professor, in the very next paragraph proceeds to completely stultify himself. "Modern Socialism is the direct outcome of the age of machine production. It takes its first inspiration from the glaring contrasts between riches and poverty presented by the modern era, from the strange paradox described above between human power and its failure to satisfy human want."

Indeed! This is a very different thing from

"divine discontent." Does the professor really know what impression he wishes to convey? Does he wish to convey anything at all intelligible, we wonder, by the whole of chapter five, except that Socialism is no good? If, as it would seem, he is concerned only with discrediting that peculiar hotch-potch of befuddled nonsense which he presents as Socialism, we could supply him with a number of excellent arguments for that purpose none of which he appears to have any knowledge of.

Modern Socialism is indeed the outcome of the machine-age, and all that that age brought with it. But this is Materialistic Interpretation with a vengeance. What can the good professor be thinking of? Or perhaps he says these things without thinking. Murder will out.

Again, referring to the passing of Feudalism, he says, "the rise of the new machine-power had dislocated the old system." Not the selfish aspirations of the rising bourgeoisie, mark you, nor their plots and intrigues and incitements to rebellion against the old order, but the "rise of machine-power." In that short sentence the professor reveals an ability to look beneath the surface of events and a complete endorsement of the Materialistic Interpretation, which is truly remarkable—remarkable, that is, in a man who can so easily cast it aside when it endangers his argument. "The writings of Marx and Engels," admits the professor, "were inspired by what they saw around them," and not—mark well—not by "divine discontent."

There are occasional passages in these articles by Mr. Leacock which suggest that he could write some really good stuff if he were not a professor with a certain social standing to lose by writing the truth as opposed to the prospect of financial gain for writing nonsense.

In other passages he contents himself with merely suggesting, implying by a sort of taken-for-granted attitude, that certain things are other than Socialists conceive them to be. For instance: "the Christian churches were to them (the early Socialists) merely the parasitic servants of the tyrannous power of a plutocratic state." If Mr. Leacock were more sure of himself or of the confiding simplicity of his readers, he might tell us how, in view of the attitude of the Christian churches during the recent war, he would go about rebutting the charge that they are "parasitic servants of the tyrannous power of a plutocratic state." If he could find no fault in the attitude of the Christian churches in Allied countries what does he think of the attitude of those same churches in enemy countries? Mr. Leacock makes no attempt to clear up this point. And he is wise. For he is without a doubt quite well aware that the attitude of the Christian churches not only during the recent war but throughout the whole of their history as state religions, pleads guilty, unblushingly, to the charge. Might we suggest that it would have been if not wiser at

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