

# The Task of the Hour

(Continued from last issue)

"THE gist of 'R's' article last issue," says "C" (Dec. 16), is "he would not support an unclass-conscious proletarian movement." We said nothing of the kind. Instead (Dec. 1) we agreed with the manifesto on proletarian identity. What we did say was that we were opposed to political parties who could not carry the flag of abolition as a first issue. And we say it again. And the manifesto implies the same thing. We say moreover that the political parties of labor are not identical with the modern proletariat and do not therefore represent an "independent movement of labor," (the proletariat). (We hope "C" will not so confuse the issue, henceforth). Again—twice indeed—(Jan. 2) "C" garbles our statements: "R. says the struggle for preservation is a futility . . . since the issue is property, the conflict must first be settled in the mind, etc." "C" here transforms the equation from the issue of property to the "struggle for preservation." We said that the issue of social revolution must be first in the mind before it can be applied in society. And we say it again. We say also that it has nothing to do with "preservation." Yet again (Dec. 16) says "C," "Away with culture. I hear 'R' say." Would "C" expect fliers in the neolithic. Knowing that fog intensifies sound vibrations we can find excuses for our good Com. But we affirm he can find no justification for his words in our article. "C" reads me a lecture on my "speculations" on Marx's optimism of revolution. He says I am "quite wrong, and the manifesto furnishes a flat contradiction." Well, we return the flat contradiction. And repeat our statement. Either the workers of '48 were wiser than their modern brethren, or, Marx was mistaken in immediate revolution.

"C" seeks to identify political labor and the revolutionary proletariat. But the two are not identical. And there was a similar division in '48. The Manifesto itself is specially named to distinguish the revolutionary communists from the nondescript "revolutionary parties" of the time, i.e., bourgeois and utopians. The mark remains today—with names reversed. "The revolutionary communists (Manifesto) are the advanced sections of the working class parties of every country . . . which pushes forward all others . . . clearly understanding the line of March and general results of the movement. Their immediate aim is the same as all other proletarian parties—(i.e., revolutionary proletarian parties. R.)—the unity of the proletariat; overthrow of the bourgeoisie; conquest of political power. They support every revolutionary movement; (dominantly) instil recognition of class antagonism; put the property question foremost; labor everywhere for democratic agreement." That clearly describes the socialist parties of today—the lineal descendants of the communists—; specifies their functions; and differentiates them, politically, from modern "labor politics." Hence the Manifesto would seem to indicate that the Socialist Party are the "sole repositories of revolution." "C" notwithstanding.

The communists (Manifesto) "support revolutionary movement everywhere because the proletariat must first settle matters, each with its own national bourgeoisie. They labor for democratic agreement, because the unity of the leading industrial countries is necessary to the revolution. They follow their general programme, and emphasise the class struggle, in order that the German workers may straightway use (to their own advantage) the social and political conditions that the bourgeoisie must introduce—so that the fight against the bourgeoisie may immediately begin. The communists choose Germany chiefly because the bourgeois revolution is there carried out under more advanced conditions and because, in Germany, the bourgeois revolution will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution." "The communists openly declare their ends attainable only by the forcible overthrow of existing conditions. . . Hav-

ing traced the civil war, raging within society, to the point of open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat and having made clear their relations to the working class parties of the world, they call upon them to unite for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, which is the signal for their own triumph." All of which fits like a bee's wing into the historic setting of '48. If, then words are the symbol of thoughts, the expectation of the immediate issue is unmistakable.

Those letters of the General Council to America fall aptly into the same historic scene; Engels says that Marx trusted to the growing intelligence of the workers. And Marx said that nations ought to profit from each other's movements. The call of the Manifesto was premature. The proletariat was defeated. The Manifesto went into a long oblivion and the working classes mingled in the "prosperities" of liberalism. Just as the politics of 1914 induced Moscow to dream of world revolution, so the world politics of the '40's induced the same illusion in the Communists. The red army of 1917; Bolshevik propaganda; Third Affiliation; Moscow generalship; and the desperate devices to achieve unity; were chiselled from the same material as the '48 advocacy of force; the star-spangled banner as the symbol of the workers; the enforced patience of the cotton crisis; the rating of American "workingmen as the true political power of their own republic"; the illusion of their support of European emancipation; the notion that the civil war sounded the tocsin of the working class; and the sentimentality of Lincoln, the son of the working class, leading his country to freedom. \* We are not mocking those aspirations for freedom; we but make them explicable on the basis of impending revolution.

Suppose we transpose the Manifesto of '47 to this present. "The communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present they also represent and take care of the future of that movement." Whence the application of that in our day? "In France the communists ally themselves with"—? Switzerland? Poland? Germany? Britain? America? There is one item of the Manifesto translatable from then to now—"the proletariat has but a fantastic conception of its own position." But if the issue of the petty trader, the grand bourgeoisie, and hence of Imperialist Capital, must first develop and fruit, and clear away the restraints of the ancient old in preparation for the new order of socialism—if that is, in brief, the consecutive progress of Marxism, and the meaning of the Manifesto, then the proletariat do well to support the Governments of the Chinese consortium. For thereby the emancipation of China will be accomplished. That emancipation is now necessary (on this basis of view) before the Commercial "Absolutism" can be brought to book. The Labor Government in Britain did well to support the Dawes scheme; the Versailles Treaty; and negotiate trade agreements. For thereby the development of Capital must develop the unity of Labor. The suppression of slavery in Africa and the support of Bolsheviks in Russia are revolutionary movements, and worthy of our enthusiasm. Because, in conjunction with the revolutionary upsurge of "Home-Rule," they enable peoples "to settle with their own bourgeoisie" in the interests of proletarian revolution. And if it was right in '50 to appeal to England in the name of the revolution to oppose the ambition of an autocratic and feudal Russia, then the proletariat were right in 1914, at the call of the same "democracy," to flock in their millions against a no less imperious autocracy. And no less authority than Trotsky said that the triumph of Germany would mean a long delay for the proletarian revolution. And no less weight than Lenin supports the

Note: \* Marx was strangely forgetful of American politics—unless on the premise of immediate revolt. Otherwise it is not even true.

statement that if we are to wait on the knowledge of the mass for Socialism it is distant by 500 years. Meaning that the application of force was the only way—a la Manifesto. How now, do the elections of Socrates become the substance of our new moon? (Incidentally, history has made pretty work of that letter of Marx: anent Russia, absolutism and democracy, etc.)

As a last remonstrance against "C's" negligent methods, may we point out that "picking up by the way" does not relate to the burghers of the middle ages, but directly to the terms of the straight issue. Also that the straight issue is not "a single plank of all or nothing," but the issue between socialism and labor politics. We said that what we picked up by the way depended on the way of our going; our going on the way of our seeing. Hence it comes that I can indicate when the burghers called the issue. For the burghers, who obtained the prestige of lord and council did so because they had a clear concept of their commercial interests, i.e., the realities of their life conditions. And they followed it unswervingly. They did not know its final result, nor the vicissitudes of the way. Nor is it necessary. But they stood on the rock foundations of fact, and were safe. Because of their perception of their interest, they modelled the policy of their conduct. And in modelling that policy they called the issue between town and country. The burghers could go by the way of reform and triumph by way of reform. Because, inherently, their system was but a reform of the political restrictions of the fief. Not an overthrow of all class-rule. To be sure, they were opposed to the aristocracy. That is, with commercial interference. But they could offer to the class rule of land a comely share in the new ethos of commerce. The taking of that offer in England, its rejection in France, were mirrored in the fiasco of the "Glorious revolution," and the red storm of '89. Their revolution was of political significance. Ours social. And social revolution cannot be accomplished by reform. Because reforms are but the whiggeries of slavery. Social revolution can be only when slaves see their slavery. Then they can only abolish it. And only they can abolish it.

Hence we again, emphasise the straight issue. That is, Socialism by the understanding of a social proletariat. Or Socialism by the adversities of opportunism. The tactics of the class struggle; of Capitalist right and its inevitable sequence. Or the tactics of labor politics; of dominance through improved conditions and institutional reforms. We hold by the former and we have shown cause for why.

Reforms by their nature are of class purpose; the necessities of dominion. Their benefits to the proletariat niggard, of no interest as a direct issue. True, we must struggle against capital in the commodity mart of labor, organise against encroachment. Still our action depends, dominantly, on the times of progress, very little on the "vision that is man." All reforms—even the 10-hour day, (and Marx is evidence for the same)—are derived from the flowing founts of change. Certainly the mass has been one of the factors in the process; but always it has been only the factor of mass. Driven by the imperative vicissitudes of the hour, feeling, seeing, suffering the immediate; sensing its degradation, and the ethical injustice of its similitude; it surges like a wave in the wake of progress, achieving amelioration in the exigencies of its conditioning. That amelioration, being in effect the limits of tolerability, appears as a pressure of insistence; and it wins, because in the courses of progress its achievement is at once a necessity and an eddy in the already flowing flood of a new progress. That is why 'tis said, "the millions can never be wrong." Rightly enough. For it expresses the terms of immediacy.

But the terms of immediacy seldom express social reality. They have often stained the pages of history. But they never made man free. And they cannot. For the terms of the moment are essentially the law of class. While the freedom of man is the freedom of truth. Hence we appeal to understanding; to social cognitions of social relations; to forward the issues of man and his freedom, against

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