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## Things That Matter

By AMBROSE TREE.

The following article comprises a stenographic report, made by Comrade Mrs. Hollingshead, of a lecture given some time ago by Comrade Tree at the Calgary Open Forum.

I am perfectly willing to admit that although I have the reputation of being a pessimist among many people who know me, yet this afternoon I am feeling pretty good with things in general, not because things in general are good but because I happen to have been in the country for two months and the sole topic of conversation has been on the number of bushels per acre and the prospects of next year's crop. Believe me it is a very pleasant feeling that comes to a fellow when he comes back to town again and realizes that there are—especially in a Forum audience—people who pay some attention to other matters and especially to the social problems that undoubtedly confront us at the present time.

Now, the townsman, because he is living in more or less close quarters with other men, is particularly adapted to thinking upon social problems. It is different in farming districts where the neighbors even are often at a distance. Under these circumstances, in the country we find very little effort on the part of the workers there to try to analyze the conditions under which they exist or to formulate any plan for the solution of their problems. In the towns the working class has in the past struggled considerably with its conditions and as a result of this struggle it has formulated very varied programs for the solution of its difficulties. Not only have the manual workers in the town their different philosophies, we find organizations of many different kinds, catering to many different interests, all attempting to solve the social problems. The Boards of Trade, the Manufacturers' Associations, cater to business people; the Trade Unions to working people. In the country even, though in tactics they are backward, we find such organizations as the United Farmers of Alberta. All these groups are endeavoring to solve the problems of the times according to programs planned for the benefit of the particular group. We are forced, then, to come to this conclusion, that the different policies which different groups have adopted or advocated for the solving of man's problems show conclusively that there are antagonistic groups within society and many schemes are devised which claim to benefit all the groups.

For instance, on the economic field we have lengthy debates on such points as protection. In these the interests of the whole nation are supposed to be taken into consideration. Protection will solve the whole problem, will alleviate all the troubles that arise within the social organism. In the same category we have such reforms as prohibition attempting to remove the evils in society. Such provisions as Workmen's Compensation, Minimum Wage Laws—all these attempt to better conditions, for even Minimum Wage Laws are supposed to reflect on business and the health of the country generally. Now, on close examination, we find that modern civilization as it exists at the present moment consists of a struggle between diametrically opposed interests. Take for instance the national clashes that divided Europe during the Great War when France and England were united by common

interests and opposed to the other group—the Central Powers, then later, as the result of the economic turn of the wheel, we find the relations between France and England strained almost to the breaking point. We find a newspaper, when the subject of restoring the Kaiser was mooted, saying, "It is hard to think of Great Britain and France getting together on a common basis with regard to the Kaiser coming back because their troubles have extended to the point that they won't act together."

It is the same in the commercial field—groups of merchants with antagonistic interests. The struggles between the groups preclude the harmonious working out of the problems between the various merchants. These are now solved to some extent by trusts, and even the trusts have their antagonisms. In the industrial field we find the opposing interests between the employer and the workmen.

Now the fact that individuals in their groups have opposing interests will inevitably lead to different philosophies with different solutions to the problems of life being put forward by each group for the benefit of that particular group. The British Government formulates foreign policies of interest to the British bourgeoisie; the Board of Trade advocates measures to the interests of the members of the Board of Trade. In industry there is precisely the same thing. The working men form their trade unions and the employer watches out in his organization that his interests are looked after. All these opposing interests account for the conflicts existing in society at the present time.

Now, belonging to the working class, it is natural that I, under the circumstances, should be biased, should look at things from the point of view of the worker's material interest, the interest of the group to which I belong. During the war there were very few who could look at things from the German point of view and in the struggles between the boss and the workers, we cannot look at things from the point of view of the boss. This afternoon I am going to put forward a point of view that will not only clear up the contradictions that arise from the varying oppositions of interests but show the cause of the evils that exist in society and the solution to the problem itself. First of all I am looking at things from the working class point of view because I am a worker. That is the practical and only thing for me to do and I find on examination that the working class, being divested of the means of finding out things from a business point of view, is the only class that is capable of looking upon modern civilization in a scientific way, thereby seeing the root of the whole set of problems that arise out of modern civilization. Now we must observe first of all that the working class is the class that produces the wealth of the world. There is no gainsaying that assertion. However much one may smother over the matter with sophistry the fact remains that the wealth of the world is the product of the working class. Nature yields up no wealth without effort and those who engage in the effort of taking from nature the wealth that is so abundant, those individuals comprise the working class. Whether they work with their brain, whether they organize the enormous machines and the complicated mechanism of modern production or whether they ply a pick with their hands, they are the working class.

Now these individuals at the present time receive a very small amount of the wealth which they produce. They are wage-workers. The vast majority who comprise the society of modern civilization are of this class receiving at the end of a certain period their wages. These wages enable them to purchase upon the market a certain amount of the wealth which they produce, a part of this wealth. Now any competent authority, say an economist, will acknowledge that the wage amounts to a living, not a luxurious wage, not a right or a just wage—whatever that might mean—but a living wage. That is a vague way of putting it but it defines the case very well as the fact that we are living proves it. The facts bear out that the working class get merely a living wage. That is to say they withdraw from the market sufficient commodities, a sufficient part of the wealth they have produced, to enable them to live in a manner fitting to the productive process, enabling them to function properly and to leave at the end of one generation another to take its place. We see then, that having a living wage at its disposal the working class exists and is confronted with its problems for solution.

As a result of all this, throughout the ages there have developed among the workers efforts and organizations for the betterment of the conditions of the working class. These questions are the things that really matter to the workers, the things upon which to centre our attention. Discussion on such questions will enable the working class to ameliorate its conditions. Let us look upon the cause of this matter of a living wage. How does it come about that throughout the centuries—six centuries of Work and Wages—the working class, wherever modern civilization exists, whether in republican America, or in colonizing England with its vast areas of undeveloped lands in Canada and Australia, in sunny France, in Germany, Italy or Japan, no matter where, how does it happen that we find the working class getting merely a living wage? The answer to that question leads to some very unpopular consequences and very unpopular conclusions. Nevertheless, I ask this Forum audience to look into this question and accept the conclusions if the facts lead you in that direction. The position of the wage worker is one of propertylessness. From the time that the feudal serf was turned off the land, from that time on has the wage worker stood without any means of producing his own living. From that time on we find the wage-worker propertyless. True, he may own a pipe, or a packet of cigarettes, or the clothes he wears, but he is divested of the ownership of the things that enable him to get wealth out of nature. The one characteristic of the working classes at the present time, their one outstanding feature, is that they own no property in the means of wealth production. It is quite evident that this is the fact. This is the condition upon which their living wage is based—quite clear, quite obvious, no question at all about it. Where the means of wealth production are fenced up, where the working class have no access to them, there they stand incapable of making a living. On the other hand it is quite clear that those individuals who do control the means of wealth production will have at their

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