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EDITORIAL

H. G. WELLS.

THE latest publicist to visit Russia is H. G. Wells. Mr. Wells is a noted novelist. He is also a master of arts, and a bachelor of science. His fanciful imagination, however, is more useful to him in gaining a livelihood than these last mentioned attainments. He was at one time (and may now be) a member of the Fabian Society.

Mr. Wells spent fourteen days in Russia. A previous visitor from England, Bertrand Russell, spent a month or more there. Mr. Russell had never been in Russia before, which was quite evident from the articles he wrote on his return, and the apparent difficulties he was under in making comparisons as between conditions past and present. While there Mr. Russell compared Russian conditions under Soviet administration with his own theories and preconceptions, and of course his theories were much nicer than conditions as he saw them in Russia. Compared with him Mr. Wells appears to be a better observer, although he does not appear to be quite as well acquainted with Marxian literature. In fact, all, in the same breath, Mr. Wells condemns the conclusion arrived at by Marx in "Capital" and proclaims that he has not studied that work. This being the case, Mr. Wells' criticism of the Marxian whiskers may be allowed to be quite in order. As we have said, he is a good observer. He has seen Marx's picture and that is all he knows about him. Not even our fanciful novelist, however, would have us condemn the theory of surplus value, the materialistic conception of history and the class struggle pronouncement because Marx chose to wear well ordered whiskers. Being a man enthusiastic about art in all its manifestations, we grant him his place as a critic in that department of human endeavour. His limitations as a critic of what is known as the Marxist position are self confessed. He has not studied that position.

But in visiting Russia he was saddled with fewer preconceptions than Bertrand Russell. He had been there in the early part of 1914, and in his recent brief visit he was able to make some personal comparisons. In industrial life, in work shops and factories, he found activity curtailed, mostly on account of the mobilization of men for defensive purposes on the various fronts. The transportation system, a basic field of operation in any country of large area, he found to be seriously out of order and in a state of disrepair. The food supply and system of rationing he found to be even worse than that obtaining in the England he knew during the time of war. The education system he found to be constructive and admirable. The communal schools were the subject of his warm admiration. In them, in their educational system and in the food administration within them he found that the system built up by Lunacharsky and his educational staff had surpassed his expectations of what was possible. Disaffection and at the same time contentment with the Soviet regime he found among the peasants. He had all the freedom of observation he required. He was sensible enough to expect that if he were taken on an official tour inspecting schools, prisons, etc., he

would be shewn these institutions under the most favorable circumstances. The same is done every where. But he anticipated this by sometimes cancelling his official engagements so that he might make surprise visits. The result of these surprise visits was good. His conclusions on the Soviet administration are warm in praise. No other group or party in Russia is possible in control. To abandon Bolshevism means murder, chaos, starvation and wholesale disintegration now. The Soviet chiefs of Departments he found to be able men and earnest workers. In administration of Russian affairs they had steered a straight course and had achieved what was impossible for any other group or party. From the ruins of Czarism they had inherited nothing but hunger and want, a broken-down transportation system and an industrial and agricultural collapse in production. They had established Dictatorship, and Dictatorship, instead of weakening, had necessarily strengthened itself in three years. Without it, any semblance of order was impossible in Russia.

With the Soviet theories and ideas of social life Mr. Wells found himself in disagreement. Of their administrative work, he has nothing to say but to praise it. In spite of the many delays in transportation and communication which, incidentally, he makes responsible for his failure to meet Lunacharsky, he thinks it astonishing that there exists any at all. There is really little in Mr. Wells' account of life today in Russia that is not published week after week in articles written by the Soviet chiefs themselves. As for instance in "Soviet Russia," the organ of the Russian Bureau of Information in New York. We have seen in the past year or two the efforts of these Russian writers to acquaint the workers of the world with Russia's condition and her needs. Their progress in construction work from period to period, their statistics of output, their laws, present plans and achievements generally, have been given publicity. Mr. Wells no doubt is fairly familiar with these or similar documents. He went to see for himself, that is all, and being a well known figure in English journalism he is able to gain the attention of all who will read and pay attention—even to a newspaper. He charges the miseries of present day Russian life to the wreckage inherited from Czarism; to six years' war and to the blockade. Anyone who expects to find uninterrupted harmony in social life and free institutions of administration—let us say democracy—in a country that has had Russia's experiences of the last six years, is blind to perception or otherwise dull. Six years of incessant warfare and three years' blockade! Any administration that could maintain existence during the last three years in Russia, even if it has not the fully comprehensive understanding of its entire population (as the theoretically pure would have it) has surely judged needs and conditions rightly as it met them.

Concerning the blockade and its effects, Mr. Wells' account of hospital equipment and surgical supplies urgently required is worthy of note. Think of a condition wherein, in a hospital, in the matter of operations, cases have to be held until the "operating day" once a week come round. This in order to conserve available supplies and prevent disastrous waste. That the Soviet medical authorities have been able to check the spread of disease is due to organized effort in the face of the utmost difficulties.

Strangely enough, from an industrial worker's point of view, the aspect of life in Russia that most arouses the interest of visitors like Russell and Wells is the cultural aspect—art, music, literature. It is strange that a man like Wells, who was prepared to see worse conditions in Russia than he found there, and who appreciated the efforts made by the Soviets to establish and maintain order amid chaos and the pressing problems that necessarily arose, should be surprised to find the healthy development and promotion of art endeavour in its various branches to be a consideration secondary to the work-a-day problems of life. In this he shows his lack of understanding of the paths of human evolution and social growth.

In all his activities man first attends to his requirements in food, clothing and shelter, and upon these, when he finds time, he builds his art. Art without this basis is useless to any society and shorn of appreciation. In the various stages of his development, the measure of man's artistic effort has corresponded to the leisure time his method of acquiring a means of livelihood afforded him. He first built his house and in his after-moments he decorated and adorned it. He first clothed himself and afterwards, in course of time, he was able to produce a coat of many colors. He was hungry and he ate what he could obtain. Primitive man knew no sauce. In supplying his meals he first met the demands of bare nature. When he has erected for himself an inhabitable house he is then able to consider decorating its walls. Use before beauty, however offensive to the artistic soul of H. G. Wells it may be, will prove a handy reference if circumstances ever overtake him and find him hungry.

And so with Russia. In a land where constructive work is in progress towards the provision of its people's needs, the first consideration lies in directing energy toward the finding of food, clothing and shelter, and making secure the certainty of continuous supply. These are the essentials. Art without these is useless, because it cannot then be appreciated. The follower of culture will attune himself in such a period to the actual requirements of the day. The requirements of the day, being met, will promote in art its impulse.

If Mr. Wells were now to devote himself seriously to a study of Marxism he might understand what he has observed. He makes some attempt at theorising and tells us the class struggle is not a fact of life. He cannot see the dividing line between bourgeois and proletarian. Marxism asserts that there is an unbridged gulf between these two classes and that they have nothing in common. In this matter we have little regard for Mr. Wells' opinions. The confusion of his mind on such a subject as this is not due to dullness but to lack of application in its study. We are familiar with those arguments from the polished and artistic lights of literature. Mr. Wells sees two hundred classes instead of two. He would argue like others of his kind that the workman who has a dollar or two to his credit in the bank is in the exploiting class as drawing interest. The day is past when we have to prove the nonsense of such hapless twitterings. The wage worker whose stomach has missed a dollar or two's worth of filling represented in a banker's meagre accounting of his savings, is but a day or two further removed from starvation than his fellows in time of stress. He maintains life, not on his savings but on the proceeds of the sale of his labor power day by day. This is the real division of classes that Mr. Wells is looking for, wage workers who sell labor power and capitalists who buy it. Labor in production and capital in appropriation; a class of producers and a class of owners; a subordinate class and a ruling class; exploited and exploiter; propertyless and property owning; proletarian and bourgeoisie.

IN DEFENCE OF CHARLIE O'BRIEN

Some time ago an appeal for funds was sent to us by the O'Brien Defence Committee, Rochester, N. Y. The appeal stated that funds were required to obtain a writ of habeas corpus for Comrade C. M. O'Brien, who was ordered deported from the United States. We thereupon decided to open an O'Brien Defence Fund in these columns, but, since later advices informed us that O'Brien had obtained the writ, and had succeeded in nullifying the deportation warrant, we waited for further information.

Our readers have been informed that Comrade O'Brien was arrested in December, 1919, under the Criminal Anarchy Law of the U. S., and that he has been on bail under the charge of having sold a copy of the Manifesto of the Communist Labor Party to a police informer. Under this law the penalty stated is 10 years in jail or \$5,000 fine, or both. O'Brien's lawyer has been promised that the case

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