

Machine production has mechanized and standardized our life of thought and action. It has also disciplined us into a stronger predisposition for co-operative activity. Its social character and the world market has compelled us to consciousness of a larger world than our local community, and we have been brought to a pass where the chief problems of the local communities are all identical in effect and cause. So far has a ground-work of new habit been laid, upon which a more extensive order of co-operative life may be erected. And educated opinion on the unrestricted private control of social means of life, as the source of social evils will still further weaken the old and strengthen new habit. But to propose wholesale sweeping changes and to expect them to materialize in any short space of time is to be either irresponsible or unreasoning.

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Moreover, those schemes of a barrack-life communism will not do. They are too simple-minded solutions. And both observation and history will attest that there is no tyranny so detestable, so narrow, hard and unenlightened as that of the simple minded. Even if such schemes are born of some thought of primitive tribal communism as being the golden age of man, it is uninformed thought, for of all forms of human association tribal life is the most exacting, least free for the individual and unprogressive. Violent outbursts of passion, emotional ecstasies and periodical orgies are the only releases that inhibited, frustrated and unused human impulses find under rigid tribal customs reinforced by magic, ritual, demonology and dreadful penalties.

No, just as the world has shifted away from tribal economy, by the same token it has also shifted away from the characteristic idea that the tribe is everything and the individual nothing. (Our day has been made familiar with a modern equivalent called the "Prussian idea.") There is now a growing sense of the worth of personality. And a state where the Great Society shall flourish must be organized for more than the bare negative function of control to prevent the anti-social excesses of economic exploitation. Social control must also include a creative function: it must mean the organization of opportunity for the creative spirit of men in all the arts and activities of life: it must mean also that men as consumers of goods and services must find their individual tastes, preferences and appreciations making effective and stimulating demands upon all productive activity, whether of material goods or education. So in a social environment rich and varied, because free experimental activity is its essence, may personality strike root in more fertile soil than the arid uniformity of a regimented social life.

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I generalize on this matter of the future of the social state because a discussion of the problem of change involves a consideration of the future, and as realistic concept of it as possible is as necessary as are correct concepts of the past and present. My generalization runs along the lines it does not only because it indicates the lines of my ideal society, but also because it runs close to the facts of human nature. We, of the modern civilized communities, are an opinionated people, increasingly so, and by the time we are ready to free ourselves from economic exploitation any government with whatever scheme of social reorganization in which there is no tender regard for the factors of custom and habit, as they prevail among the masses of men, will have a brief career and a disastrous ending. My conclusion is, then, from a consideration of the inert forces of custom and habit, and whatever character the struggle for power takes on, short or prolonged, social reconstruction must necessarily be a prolonged, experimental effort. A similar conclusion is to be derived from technical considerations which are so obvious that I need only to refer to the matter. Capitalism is after all a going concern supplying the world with the necessities of life. The credit institution is the heart of the system, and an interruption of credits would mean a cessation of exports and imports and so plunge whole peoples into chaos. Picture

Great Britain with its great city populations, only one-tenth of its population on the land. It is impossible for that people to fall back into a peasant economy as they did in Russia, though even there at a terrible price. An animal struggle for sheer physical needs of life could only occur. In such a competitive life human beings could not think socially or take long sighted views, and the strong, brutal, the unscrupulous and predatory elements would dominate the remnants of the population. The population in Great Britain have a sense of the dangers of their position, having had them recently forced on their consciousness at the height of the U boat campaign during the war: "Business as usual during alterations" might be said to express their state of mind. No doubt temperament and the historical traditions of the British community also support that reasoning; for, in comparison with the history of the French or Russian people, for instance, British domestic history, religious and secular, has largely been one of peaceful change through compromise until reaction has finally found itself so weak in the face of the persistent pressure of massed public opinion, manifesting itself in other ways than by military force, as to accept the inevitable. As a people too, their imaginative powers seem to be on a low material plane. The popular imagination never seems to be caught by social ideals that have not an air of immediate feasibility. Did the great Napoleon speak wiser than he knew of English psychology when he said that "the English were a nation of shopkeepers?"

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To return to the question of our pre-war preconceptions. When, as a student of social phenomena, I reflect over the course of things since that time in Russia, in Italy, Germany, the British Isles or America, I do not see how any socialist could live through those years without the social problem now assuming different aspects and proportions to what it did formerly. In my own case, which I venture to say is not uncommon, the period has been marked by the destruction of many illusions and of many assumptions which had been taken for granted without much thought. I am frank to say we were out of date in our understanding of social psychology and of the economics of the capitalist system, considered as a going concern. In the latter study we were handicapped by a misinterpretation of the theory of the law of value, a misinterpretation we had inherited. (See "Geordie's" review of the "Plebs" Text Book in last issue). For instance, we knew (?) we knew (a priori) before the facts were gathered (consequently we unconsciously selected those that agreed with our law and all others were merely "disturbing" factors) that all departures of prices from an alleged normalcy were rectified over a period of time through the law of value acting as a law of compensation: Omniscience reincarnate. Yet all the while the facts were against us—the world of economic reality was the Price System; and a dominating fact in it and not merely a "disturbing" fact, was monopoly control. Thus did misunderstanding of a theory constrict and paralyse our efforts to analyse and explain the system of exploitation in its full anti-social enormity.

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Here let me summarize the main points in my argument up to now, with additional comment tacked on, as follows: (1) That owing to the social nature of modern production and the dependency of society on the continuous working of this world economy, the modern State was being compelled to take on more and more economic functions of control and operation, i.e., it is perforce invading the field of private enterprise, directly in operation and nationalization, and indirectly, through extension of State credits, subsidies, franchises and by legal enactments and the power granted arbitration boards regulating hours of work, rates of wages, and the guaranteeing of minimum rates of profit, etc. Comment: Community interest and private interest may coincide or they may not in any particular instance of this trend of State policy. But on the whole this trend appears as partly a blind, partly a reluctant advance to a larger State control over social and economic processes. How the State can

be made to serve the general body of the community in this policy is the business of the community. In another issue I may deal with the State.

(2) That a better condition of social affairs in the future is not inevitable as unthinking optimists assume. Comment: It is just a question of the play of forces in the social process. Factors that at one time may be undeveloped may later play a dominating part, and vice versa. What we can point out is that if man handled social forces as intelligently as he handles natural forces there would be some surety of the future. The future is not a distant goal but some thing we are always growing into; and an intelligent handling of the facts of the present is its only guarantee within the limits set by luck. There are forces in man as well as in the environment which can be developed for control.

(3) That the progressive degradation of the working class is not in the interest of the social revolution; and that the struggle for reforms both on the economic and political field is necessary even from the revolutionary standpoint.

(4) That a transition period to a new order is inevitable.

(5) That, on the workers side, the class struggle should be waged with social concepts so that they may become an initiating force in social change. Trades union anti-capitalist class-struggle concepts belong to the capitalist regime and reforms merely of an ameliorative character.

(6) That to recognize that part played in life by "fate" and "function" constitutes a fundamental insight into human affairs. All forms of life exist on the basis of function, they flourish or languish or pass away, not on their own merits or demerits as self-contained units, but as they function in the environment or, to put it another way, they are functions of the environment; when the environment ceases to use them, or to have use for them, they perish whatever their abstract ideal merits.

To recognize the part in life played by fate is to recognize the vastness of the unknown, and to grasp the more firmly that which we know and use it in the present as our only control over the course of things in the future.

These are a graceless set of notes, and I have had little pleasure in writing them. Accept my apologies.

In next issue I propose saying something on the nature of reforms, and what I think should be a revolutionary's stand to them. I propose also to touch upon the State with a view to some social functions it performs.

Should any readers be interested enough to write their opinions, critical or otherwise, I shall be glad to receive them through the Editor. I could then take up objections or suggestions, publishing such letters, or pertinent extracts from them as space will allow. Set articles, however, belong to the Editor to do with as he wills. Perhaps those who wish to deal with me in that fashion had better wait till I am through or further on with my argument.

C.

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