

Constitutional Methods

Direct and Political Action—What Are They? What Do they Mean?

ALL societies are organized about their means of obtaining a livelihood, and the nature and character of that organization is determined by the manner in which that livelihood is obtained. In brief, that man's social institutions are the consequence of the material conditions of life.

Political societies imply ruling and subject classes, and the keynote of political organization is the dominance by a ruling class of the social means of life, i.e., by property right in life's necessities, secured by class legislation. How this idea of property arose or how the form of property right has changed is not the motive of this article. As the title implies, we must begin with the form of society in which it is our fortune (?) to live, and in which, alone, those terms have any significance.

Capitalist society is divided into two main classes—a relatively small, non-producing, owning class, and a large non-owning producing class. This small owning class, by its possession and control of the means of life, dictates the conditions of life to the producing class. Labor is necessary to sustain life, but labor can only function on the terms imposed by property right, and naturally, the terms are favorable to property-holders. Also, no matter how necessitous may be the conditions of the subjugated class, the behests of the legal class-owners govern the nature and direction of social production which has been established by social need. The function of a ruling class is to govern and maintain its privileged position: of a slave class to perform service for its masters. The real interests of these two classes are, therefore, opposed—one struggling for privilege, the other to escape its impositions. It would seem that a large, numerous slave-class might easily escape from the rule of a small owning-class. But it appears not. Why? How do the few maintain their power over the many?

In this way: Society, like all other phenomena in nature, is a growth, an evolution from prior condition. The present social relation of Capital did not always exist, nor the power of its capitalists. Out of the social needs of a pre-existing society it came into being. From bondage, out of a savage and bitter struggle with a former ruling class, it rose to power and place, setting up its new standards of life; its new regulations of interests, its new thought and endeavor in conformity with the inevitable development of social growth. And it achieved success because of this harmony with the social forces, because it satisfied social necessities that could not be otherwise satisfied, because it was, temporarily, in agreement with and performed service imperatively demanded by social progress.

In the performance of this service the new social relationship, of necessity, assumed the form and adopted methods most suitable to its own development; and this form and method being the continued evolution of the expanding powers of social production, it secured to itself the adherence

of the social community. But this new social relation and its commercial interests, although receiving the sanction of necessitous society, was a class interest, and being a class interest, could attain security only by class action—legalizing its actions for the perpetuation of its interests by political domination. It is this political dominance of class interests (established on and through the needs of society, and the force of social opinion) that holds the dominated class in bondage; holds the slaves in bonds of class law, until again the social powers of production shall shatter the confining bonds.

This present system of society—Capital—is founded on wage-labor, commodity production, and its political organization is designed with the single purpose of preserving its economic supremacy. The development of the economic of capital has been the architect of its political structure and the reflex of this developed condition overshadows and determines, with the same process of inevitability, the actions and ideas of the slaves. Hence the political bondage of Capital, veiled with its class concepts of "individual right," "liberty of action," "freedom of expansion," etc., confuses the subjugated class with conceptions far removed from reality, by the long centuries, of the exercise of property right, adapted and expanded by the champions of the new "freedom," and so overmasters us with the tradition of its sanctity.

But property-right is class-interest, and as property vests in individuals, individuals in society have the right to hold and, in consequence, to safeguard their interests in property. Property is thus held by social sanction, and being thus held, is regulated by social custom, and this custom and sanction is employed—or exploited—by the capitalist class to build up its political institutions and formulas for the preservation of its privileged interests.

Furthermore, property can only exist in things subject to social control, otherwise the right could not be exercised. And being subject to this control, can be, therefore, none other than the social means of subsistence. The means of subsistence being thus the subject of property right the regulation of property is neither more nor less than government—the passing of laws and enactments, the creation of councils and executives, enacted and created by property-holders, for the preservation of their class interests. In other words, that the power of the State is exerted in the maintenance of privilege.

In the process of development, social organization generates of itself new forces and conditions. These new forces and conditions react on individual interests, creating conflicts of interests in the social body. These discordant interests require to be adjusted or eliminated if society, in the form it has assumed, is to be developed to maturity, if its members as a majority are to have satisfaction of their life's necessities. These negotiations and adjustments take place, according to a certain agreement or plan laid down—or rather, evolved in course of time—by governments of in-

terests for their guidance in the management of property right. This agreement is called the "code" or "constitution," written or traditional. It is the system of property laws, whereby property holders in the means of life manage and administer their common interests in principle. In this regulation of the affairs of privilege reference is made to the "constitution" and according as the adjustment suggested, or the method pursued harmonises with the "book of the law" it is, or is not, "constitutional."

Since Government is the preservation of privilege, or conversely the subjugation of a slave class, property interests may safely be entrusted to their owners. We can rest assured in absolute security that as far as the ownership has vision, those interests will be held inviolate. And if, when the progress of material condition inaugurates a change in the venue of possession, the constitution may be and is amended to suit the new condition. A slave class having no possession, has no interest in constitutions, save as legal formality may assist it as a (in this system) commodity sellers. The law of the constitution is the perpetuation of the law and order of ruling class society, that is, for the slave class, the perpetuation of its slavery.

Society, being thus divided into two opposing economic classes, the consequent conditions, mutually react on each other. The owners must organize as their commercial needs demand. The slaves must do likewise, and the organization of the latter will be determined and patterned by the former. The concentration of capital intensified competition in turn, straightening the life conditions of the slaves—capital struggling for a greater volume of profit, labor, for a greater share of its production. In both cases a commodity struggle; capital seeking to buy social labor as cheaply as possible; the worker to sell his labor-power as dearly as he can.

Master class associations and working class organizations, are thus the fruit of the capitalist system of production. Both class organizations deal only with effects; both ignorant of the prime cause of social movement. And because, both master and slave meet on the economic field as commodity traders and because their economic interests are opposed, conflict takes place and is fought out primarily on the industrial plane—invariably to the confusion of the workers. For it is not property right of itself that constitutes the power of the capitalist class, it is the class command of the powers of the State, which, through its political machinery, legalizing title to class ownership, justifies the control and concept of property. Moreover, the amelioration of social conditions is not brought about by industrial organizations, but by the development of capitalist economy and the blind commodity struggle, not only tends to augment competitive intensity, but, in the end, in reality, lowers the relative wages of the workers. A perception of this state of affairs causes the workers to organize industrially at the point of production,

where they are exploited on the job; the idea being apparently that by industrial control of industry, the power of the master class can be overthrown.

But they attempt on the part of the workers, to control their means of life by controlling the industries to which they are attached, brings them into conflict with the State on the property question, and being a violation of property interest, is therefore, unconstitutional, and being unable on account of economic conditions to present a united front to Government, the attempt to control industrially, proves abortive.

However, the realization of this feature, in face of a powerful State, presents us clearly and unambiguously with the issue of social relationship. The concentration of capital will continually and progressively increase the numbers and destitution of the proletariat; abolish all minor class interests, disintegrate the concepts of capitalist idealism, and finally put the property right of the non-producing owner against the necessity of society. Age-long and stubborn preconceptions and prejudices are thus broken in the crucible of fact, and the new ideation of the slave, in the control of his means of life, will assume the hue of the political. United and organized, world-wide and class-wise on this political basis, cognizant of the State and its power, and clearly visualizing the issue of property right, the workers thus bringing their whole power and intelligence, knowledge and effort into the political field, uniting the productive processes with the machinery of control at once and automatically transform all action, into political action for the triumph of emancipation.

But this method, too, will be "unconstitutional," and more; it will be revolutionary. Because the control by labor of its means of life, means the abolition of capitalist property—the basis of all constitutionalism.

Nevertheless, in due time the conversion from capitalist "right," to social utility will happen, and when it does, the historic condition of the day, heedless of codes and constitutions will determine the methods and devise the weapons for the complete emancipation of the proletariat. The economic of a social system, having genesis in that particular form of organization, is spun on the loom of social necessity, and in obedience to the principle of causation, takes its deliberate course, not to the desire of class, not to the will of man, but as expanding social forces inspire and direct it. R.

NEW PUBLICATION BY HUEBSCH PUBLISHING HOUSE

B. W. Huebsch, Publisher, New York City, announces for immediate publication a contribution to an understanding of Russia and of the Allied policy toward that country: "THE BULLITT MISSION TO RUSSIA, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of William C. Bullitt." It includes these important documents in full: Lenin's Peace Proposals, Bullitt's Report on Russia, Lincoln Steffens' Report on Russia, Capt. Pettit's Reports on Russia, Discussions of the Peace Conference on a Policy towards Russia. The book contains 160 pages and will be published in two editions: Paper covers, 50 cents; Cloth covers, \$1.00. Add postage 10 cents. Those desiring copies of the first edition are urged to order promptly. Mr. Bullitt's story is the logical sequel to Ransome's "Russia in 1919," (\$1.50), now in its third edition. Mention "The Indicator" when ordering. B. W. Huebsch, Publishers, 32 West 58th Street, New York City, N.Y.