

A Letter on Social Change

Dear Comrade:

Your letter received and contents noted. I gather that my views of social change, do not entirely meet with your approval. Probably I am pessimistic, and very probably my notions of how the change will be effected are wide of what the fact may prove to be. The transformation, in your terms of social sanity, may prove prophetic—as beyond all question, it is the better method.

Still, although I defer to your weightier opinion, I hardly agree with it. And I am still pessimistic. I do not think we have seen the darkest hour. Rather is it the perumbra—we have yet to enter the real shadow. Data is not mine to judge truly, but if, out of all the brutality, repression, thrust upon the world, as it now is, by a profit blind financial oligarchy, there comes not, a fierce reaction, I am not understanding the situation.

And what is the situation? Allied interference has crushed all resistance in Central Europe; the minor States from the Black Sea to the Baltic, are strung in the toils of Allied diplomacy, Austria completely subdued, Germany utterly broken. And in all that wide stretch of territory, famine, destitution, disease and death prevails; normal life conditions shattered by war—and more chaotic with "peace"; and Imperialism plunging through the bloody ruin, heedless of its handiwork, frantic for its market.

Now those peoples appear to be apathetic, weary from the agony of

But it is inconceivable that such a situation can long continue; as inconceivable that capitalism will revoke it. Because, with Bolshevism threatening its existence, as Jehovah threatened the Caananites, capitalist control and repression dare not be relaxed. What will be the nature of the reaction? Is action not the expression of thought? And in face of capitalist despotism, will—can—thought be enlightened? Till capital collapses, will not the capitalist class resist? In "the last man and the last dollar" spirit? Would the Russian revolution have been as mild as it was, but for the war? Is not Britain ruled despotically by Imperialism? Does it not mock working class aspirations? Counter its "pretensions," resist all demands for better conditions; and render nugatory, every working class protest and suggestion? And while yet its breath is warm with tales of a "new world"—a hypocrisy which raises the heat under one's collar—is it not organizing and gathering together its forces in battle against labor? And it is not a threat merely. Capital, steel-clad, booted and spurred, is everywhere riding a high horse.

Labor feels its misery and servitude with a keenness that needs no telling. But does it know the cause? Quite true the workers are "gathering strength"—the pressure of economic conditions is forcing us into unanimity. And while unanimity implies a conscious objective, that objective is not born of political understanding, but of industrial misery. In other words, it is the common struggle for existence, that gravitates us together, and not the recognition of class interest.

There can be no doubt that change has come upon working class organisations. The germ of power-conscious-

ness is born within them, but only born—or they would not bother about reforms. The automatic conduct and orderliness of strikes, rallying to the support of comrades, fighting for "rights," etc., may be due, as much to union discipline, habit of thought, and social custom, as to consciousness of social status, or any clear cut definiteness of aim or goal. The mutual association of victims of a common exploitation, if not clearly conscious of that exploitation, may, of itself, offer a pretext for capitalist interference and tyranny, may be transformed into a dangerous association. May it not? Are not the driving forces, on both sides, becoming more urgent? Is necessity not growing more desperate? And is not immediate necessity invariably far in advance of social understanding?

The expansion of capital—apparently to its logical conclusion—is the pre-requisite of educational principles. And in the nature of things, that expansion far outstrips the rate of education. Because, the habits and customs of a society are (as you well know) the resultants of its material conditions. Those customs and ideas are imposed on the social members; they become local factors, influencing further development. But, they are also the ethic of the dominant social forces, and until those forces have

developed their own negation, established custom cannot be broken, or arbitrarily set aside.

True, "rationality will increase as the day draws nigh," but, likely in a limited sense, or scope. I grant you that the conditions favorable to the growth of rationalism will be greatly augmented. But that is a different matter. When the change comes and the new ethic takes form, the new social consciousness will be developed, will become the dominant habit. The new society will grow in, and of, the conditions, generated by the old, but the new social consciousness can only acquire dominance under the influence of the new order. History seems to point the lesson, that, so far, we are driven, not persuaded, and when the social forces compel society to act, if circumstances are propitious, an intelligent minority may guide its destinies into channels of wisdom and peace. For sake of that minority and in hope of such an eventuation, I subscribe most earnestly to the doctrine of education. And education may be aided by military science. The modern, scientific means and methods of destruction, might be too appalling to contemplate, might be beyond the command of proletarian effort, and that fact, and not rationalism, might compel the transition to ways of comparative peace.

I apologise for this forward trespass on your long suffering, and I am gratefully appreciative of your personal efforts to set my feet on the "straight and narrow way."

Yours for Socialism, R.

CONNOLLY'S POLICY

MORE and more it becomes apparent (in spite of the suppression of the national press) that the people of Ireland have at last united on a truly national basis and have purged from the national entity the last vestige of Imperial Anglophobia; that for the first time in history agitation in Ireland has assumed an economic as well as a political aspect. The present policy of Sinn Fein is as much the result of Connolly's fight against the economic exploitation of the working people as is Pearce's struggle for their political freedom.

When in 1798 Wolfe Tone first advanced his republican theories, he also advanced a system of economics that kept the land-owning classes from his banner. Again in 1848 when Mitchell declared for an economic as well as a political revolution, he found himself opposed by the wealthy political Girondins. But the Land League struggle, while it was abandoned before any decision was reached, yet showed the people the possibilities of this form of agitation, and the Gaelic League through its educational policy has shown the people how alien to the national conscience was the British idea of property in land. So that the combination of the Republican Policy of Wolfe Tone, the economic policy of Mitchell and Lalor, the communal policy of Gaelic Leaguers, and the abstention policy of Griffith's, are now combined and form the aims of Pearce and Connolly in 1916, and the platform of De Valera and Griffiths in '18.

The political and economic platform of Sinn Fein can be summed up in the words of Lalor—"That the sole ownership of Ireland is vested of right in

the people of Ireland, that they and they alone are the law makers and landowners of this island, that all laws are null and void, not made by them, and all titles to land invalid not conferred or confirmed by them, and that this right of full possession should be asserted and enforced by all means in the power of men. They challenge the right of the viceroy in Dublin to make the laws of the country, but they also challenge the right of each and every landlord in the country to make the economic conditions on their various estates. They criticise the right of renegade Irishmen to call in the military forces of a foreign power to restrain working Irishmen from attempting to secure and obtain the necessary economic status which is their right as natives of Ireland to demand. They criticise the right of a small minority to impose their will on a large majority and to prevent and obstruct the political aims of such majority. They believe that the bad economic conditions are due entirely to the political control of the country and its industries by a foreign power and the exploitation of these bad conditions by a renegade group of Irishmen, under the protection of the foreign power. They moreover maintain that the depopulation of the country is due more to the economic conditions created by the foreigner than the political status of the country. For Ireland now realizes the truth of Lalor's words when he said—"Let laws and institutions say what they will, this fact will be stronger than all laws and prevail against them, the fact that those who own your lands will make your laws and control your lives and your liberties."

Is it then any wonder that the Murphy's and Guinnesses and Landsdownes and Dunsanys still earnestly desire and fight for the British connection.

France needed three revolutions before finally arriving at the solution of the needs of the people. America, whilst breaking the political control of Europe still retained the European form of civilisation and that state today, is more autocratic than the Tories she overthrew. Ireland seeing this, must take them as the lessons of history and shape her destinies accordingly. She has enemies galore inside as well as outside, but the spirit of Connolly is alive among the people and whatever the paid press of Imperialism may propagate among the outside world, Sinn Fein today is heart and soul in the cause of Universal Liberty.

P. J. O'D. READ.

Egotism or Altruism?

LET us not forget that there is nothing intrinsically noble or beautiful in the socialist movement that we should desire to preserve its existence. On the contrary, it can be shown, without any contortion of metaphor, that like the Liberal or Tory movement, it is a DISEASE. Or, rather, like skin eruptions upon a human body, it is a symptom of internal disease, and therefore part of the disease. The existence of the political and industrial Socialist Movements indicated that there is such a faulty and unjust method of wealth production and distribution in society, that class hatreds and warfare arise; which further results in the creation of opposing armies, one such being the Socialist organizations. Even the splendid feats of self-sacrifice performed within the Socialist Movements are exactly similar to the warfare and self-sacrifice between the healthy elements in the blood, against the disease-spreading organisms which invade the body; the struggle between the two being a feature of the ailment.

Our business, therefore, is not to prolong the life of the Socialist Movement, but to fight Capitalism to a finish and by the establishment of the Socialist Republic itself, render the Socialist Movement unnecessary; for Socialism is Health, Peace and Happiness; while under Capitalism, the workers have only their chains, as Marx says, to lose, and a whole world to win.

From another standpoint one can forgive the ego-Socialists for their harsh attitude towards their fellow-workers. We live, at present, in an imperfect world, amidst imperfect people, forced relationships and intercourse. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" has a cynical basis of truth. Did not the late Prof. Haeckel write, that many men would gladly forego the "delights" of an after life, if it meant that they were doomed to spend an eternity in the society of their immortal "better-halves" or mothers-in-law? Schopenhauer puts it still more neatly in a parable of his about a number of porcupines, who, on a cold winter day, huddled together for warmth; but as they began to prick one another with their quills, they were compelled to disperse. However, again the cold drove them together, and the same trouble happened.

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