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Socialistic Reminiscences of the Klondike

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It has been our lot to have been impressed for the first time with the truths of scientific socialism in the far-away Klondike about twelve or thirteen years ago. We had a small fractional claim on Sulphur Creek and worked with pick and shovel, or windlass, in search of the medium of exchange with which to secure the coveted beans and lubacks. We had plenty of spare time in the two-thousand-hour summer day, or in the long winter evenings, and few there were that didn't take advantage of it.

One had to be very careful in the accuracy of his statements in those days, since capable critics in overalls seemed to be a feature of the landscape; indeed, the ubiquitous overall was the one touch of art that made the northern world kin, for underneath its every fold the distinctions of class lay dormant. It was much better so, since the custom bred in men a tendency to judge each other by what was said rather than by what was worn; and as for what was said goes, our word may be taken for it that the volume of mixed-garvality and eloquence that greeted the discovery of economic determinism had an effect similar to that of the charge of the light brigade; it made all the local world wonder, for in a good-natured way the sourdoughs were not at all backward in joining verbal battle with each other; and on such occasions the cosmopolitan character of the contestants had a most extraordinary effect in rich variety of expression.

On the particular day we refer to, however, a few ordinary individuals of various nationalities stopped to talk with a miner who was taking out a dump by the roadside. As we drew near to the group the stentorian voice of a Scandinavian floated with undulatory modulations towards our ears. "By Ynamie, Walter Thomas Mills can't tell me that the wheels of industry will ever stop. People wouldn't stand for it," said he. "Arrah, out that out!" said Pat McCann, who had arrived in time to hear the last few words. "Give the wheel-barrow a rest."

"That's right, Pat, give him 'ell!" said Cockney Jim.

"We're not talking shop," said McGregor. "Mills claims that the extension of markets cannot keep pace with the extension of production. It would be silly to produce commodities that couldn't be sold; consequently the wheels of industry could hardly be expected to revolve."

"Dat de peep would never allow the wheels of industry to stand still," said Tony, the 'Eve-talian."

"Dat's yourt it," said the Swede, "and dat's why I say dat W. T. Mills is peddling de bull." And so the row began—a row most fruitful in its results, since it was the beginning of a series of discussions on the same subject leading up to the study of "Mills' Struggle for Existence," and the acceptance by most of the group of the truths embodied in the doctrine of scientific socialism.

Enthusiasm ran high; yet no organization that we heard of was attempted on the creek. To balance this state of affairs, however, a score or more subscriptions were sent to "Cotton's Weekly" (the

Canadian "Appeal to Reason.") One of these was addressed to Mr. Treadgold, the best known and most popular representative of finance capital in the whole territory.

Some of the subscribers lived on Gold Run, and on that creek we had the pleasure of listening to a few of them discourse at a Christmas dinner subsequent to the time of their inspiration by the remarks of Mr. Cotton. One young bacchanal was thinking of sending his post office address, as he understood it, to a friend in the States. It read: "Dawson, Alaska."

"You don't suppose Dawson is in Alaska," said one of the guests.

"Sure I do; where else would it be?" he replied.

"Why it's marked in Yukon Territory in my atlas."

"And where did you get that atlas?" he went on.

"I had it sent from Copp Clarke's in Toronto," said the guest.

"I thought so," was the triumphant reply. "You couldn't have run up against a worse bunch of capitalists; surely you don't believe what they say!"

A little later the subject of kings was introduced.

"You must hand the cake to us Americans for one thing," said the barber's wife. "We republicans have no kings."

"Mon Dieu!" said Frenchy LeMaitre, scratching his head. "Of all your institusheongs you have more of de king dan any oder, every time I go prospecting I pay tribute to—what do you call him—suere—sugar I mean, your sugar king; or your beef king; or your oil king. Ma foi! you help to make your Rockerfeller, or your Armour, or a lot of other kings, rich."

"Not only do your kings make Americans pay fabulous sums to their support, but da send dere goods all over de earth and make the nations of de world pay tribute to dem."

"We, de people, are all very loyal to what we tink is our own particular realm, but we haven't waked up yet to the fact dat our realm is international an dat we pay enormous sums of money to support the international kings of finance. You yank-kays have got rid of de old feudal king, who is at present, in Europe, an official for laying foundasheon stones and setting fasheongs in hats, but in his stead you now have hundreds of money kings, many of whom could buy the palaces of a couple of European monarchs and still consider themselves rich men. De same may be said of de money kings of Europe. De ting for us to do is to find out how dese money kings become so rich. Dey are demonstrating how wealth accrues to those who own the means of life. It only remains for the proletaire to study dere metods and follow dere example."

The barber's wife collapsed at this show of eloquence. She, poor soul, knew nothing of world politics and looked at Frenchy in helpless amazement.

"You are a most ungallant Frenchman to attack a lady in such a manner," she said, "next time you come here I shall have read up on the subject and

then you look out Mr. Frenchy"; and thus did Frenchy's little speech bear good fruit.

After this we worked on our fraction for another year, and then as the Googenheimers (the dredging magnates) had bought out all our neighbours; as our dam needed repairs; and as our pay-streak was almost run out, we presented our claim to our partner who, in the first place, was instrumental in helping us to get possession of it, and sought work from the company mentioned above with the intention of making our fare out of a country where the day of the individual miner was drawing to a close.

The work consisted in thawing from twenty to thirty feet of frozen muck that rested on the surferous gravels. Men worked in pairs, and took turns at holding a "twisters" attached to a thirty-foot live steam pipe, or in standing on the top of a ladder and pounding the pipe into the ground with a maul.

There was plenty of spare time during the intervals that the pipes were thawing after each forced descent of a foot, but whenever a man talked socialism on these occasions he was not long in discovering that from the company's viewpoint he was wasting time; perhaps he was too, but however that might be he soon found himself on the night shift with a partner that spoke little English. There weren't many such men but there were a few who said just what they thought without any prospect of a reward and well knowing that such procedure destroyed all chances of promotion.

Similar action was taken by certain brothers who kept the post office on Dominion Creek, a few miles distant from Sulphur. They, a short time before, had had a dairy in San Francisco, and came north at the time of the big fire. Their particular line of work for the cause was the distribution of socialist literature. We never ran across the Western Clarion up there, but these enthusiasts subscribed to the "New York Call," "Cotton's Weekly"; "The Appeal to Reason"; "The International Socialist Review"; and some socialist magazines. These were distributed to those interested and, no doubt, did a lot of good during their stay in the country; perhaps they are there yet, but wherever they are, their work of love in trying to awaken the latent instinct of liberty that inheres in all men must be bearing fruit, more or less, in widely different parts of the earth's surface to which the former denizens of Dominion Creek have scattered ere now.

These postmasters were also successful miners; indeed, most men who owned claims on the upper part of the creek were successful, yet they say there has been more money spent on mining in the Klondike than ever was taken out of it—at least during the individual miner's day. Whatever work was wasted incidentally to this was, of course, a total loss, but the unpretentious propaganda work that the self-taught socialists mentioned in this article did in that country, can never be lost. It is like the quality of mercy: "It is twice blessed; It blameth

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