

Poverty: Its Cause and Cure

THE existence of poverty, being generally felt, is generally admitted. Various "causes" are assigned for its continued existence, such as drink, unemployment, gambling, laziness, and extravagance. The first three of those reasons we dismiss cavalierly, being effects and not causes, and the latter two require no comment.

But the question remains, why are we poor, Why is poverty so universal? Why, in spite of almost continuous toil, year in and year out, cannot we command anything more than the barest necessities of life? Never to speak of comforts or luxuries, even in a whisper. And if idleness overtakes us for a brief space, starvation, gaunt and utter, faces us, in spite of a "thrift" that turns life into gall and wormwood, in spite of the most desperate pinching that numbs us with our own impotence, and kindles in our hearts a consuming fire of commingling rage, agony and bitterness. And this in the midst of abundance, with flaunting, wanton luxury on every hand. Why is it?

Society is an organization whose will, law, or sentiment is supreme. Socially therefore, man is not an individual but a unit, an atom in that organization and becoming a member of society willy-nilly, is compelled to live his life under the particular form the society has assumed, agreeably with its institutions, and in conformity with its social concepts. If he attempts otherwise, social sentiment will overwhelm him in his vanity, and will break his idealistic endeavor on the tense frame of its economic determination. All of us begin the struggle of life with rainbow winged hope, beckoning us to the mountain top of human achievement, but anon the luring lights grow pale like stars at dawn, and the gray, frowning cliffs of material fact loom up bald and clear, above the illusory dreams of youth.

In this present form of society into which we have adventured we find a social condition, where those things necessary to the sustenance of life are owned and controlled by a particular class, and if we would obtain a portion of those necessities we must apply to the owners thereof for the privilege of working to and for them. For unless we do work we do not eat, require but few clothes, and a humble six foot cavity for shelter. Which is just as it should be, only it has to be given a social, and not merely a class application.

Having passed through more or less exciting adventures at about the age of 14, we are invited, more or less pleasantly, to take a hand in the "game" of life, and for exemplars we are pointed to those gallant knight errants of labor who have attained to high places and honor—like the ancient Joseph for instance—or the modern Rockefeller—by their own initiative and enterprise. We thereby begin the "romance" of finding a master—a comparatively easy task at 14, living at home, and not unduly intruding upon the larger interest of the "great man" for whom we work, with our petty little annoyances relative to wages. But boyhood passes into youth, with the awakening ambitions and passions; imperceptibly almost, we go into a wider circle of activities; make our debut on the stage of responsibility. We begin to glimpse the strenuous reality of the game, to have a foretaste of the struggle of maturity, and dimly to see, or rather to have a vague presentiment, that somehow, somewhere the dice is loaded. And in the dim shadows of this presentiment we come, fairly and squarely, face to face with the grizzly spectre of poverty. The rising demands and widening interests proceeding from our changed status in life bring the question of money into the forefront of our new condition. For most of us the fount and spring of money is wages. Now what are wages?

Wages is the market price of our labor power, our ability and energy to work at the aforementioned job which the master had so kindly given us. But we want that price increased. More wages. It is not enough for our needs. Why not? The "boss" makes lots of money, rides about in his motor, summers at the coast; entertains lavishly; (not the workers), owns houses; buys costly things; spends

money like water. And yet he won't raise our wages one cent. (A stubborn sort of mule, the "boss") Why is this? Thusly. Everything in his capitalist system of society is produced as a commodity, i.e., for sale, and the market price of commodities is regulated by supply and demand. A big supply and no demand, less price, and vice-versa. But the labor power of the workers is also a commodity; its price regulated in the same manner, by supply and demand. As there is all the time a greater supply of labor power than jobs for its exercise, the price, wages, of that labor power is low, and the inertia of its own economic holds that price to the limit of necessity. That necessity is the market price of those commodities requisite to support life, food, clothing and shelter. The master therefore does not, and can not, determine wages at all. It is the economic determination flowing from the competitive commodity system of production, which holds the price of wages in balance with the necessities required to maintain it.

But if labor power receives its market price, how does it come that the master has commodities to sell at all? The worker produces all, and has nothing to sell but labor power. Yet he cannot buy back what he has produced. Why this? Because efficiency in production and the introduction of power driven machinery increases the productive capacity of labor power immensely. Also, since the capitalist class own the material and machinery of production, not only does this ownership allow the master to set the terms under which the workers toil, but it also gives the owning class the property right to all that the worker produces through the medium of that machinery. The worker, working eight or ten hours daily (as master class necessity shall decide), produces an infinitely greater value of commodities than the value of the commodity labor power, which produced them. The value of a commodity is the socially necessary labor contained in it. The value of labor power, therefore, is the value contained in the things necessary to reproduce it, i.e., food, clothes, and shelter. But the value of the total product is greater than the value of labor power. Hence the surplus. And since competition practically brings the market price of commodities to the value level of the socially necessary labor in them, the price of labor power on the average equals its value,—the necessities requisite to reproduce it in a physical state of efficiency. As we have shown, this value, being less than the value of its produce, it is impossible that it buy back the surplus it has created and left by property right in the hands of the master class. Lastly, the increasing difficulty of the master class to find markets in which to dispose of the surplus, and since production is for profit, the lack of those markets, compels the industrial machine to stop, and in the midst of plenty the producers of that plenty starve.

Capitalist ownership and control of the means of life and the commodity nature of production, flowing therefrom, is the cause of poverty. And the remedy, and the only remedy, is the abolition of that system of control and production of the means whereby society secures its livelihood, and the substitution of social ownership and control, and production for use, not for profit. No reform, however ably conceived, no ideal, however lofty, can relieve the traffic of wage slavery, or void its economic sequence. Abolition of the capitalist system, thorough and utter, is the one hope of social salvation. Only by the abolition of profit can the leprosy of capitalist hypocrisy be stricken from existence; only by the social use of life's necessities can freedom dower us with the majesty of manhood; only by the social ownership of social ability can the doors of equality be thrown open; only by the social possession of the lordliest intellect and genius that springs, soaring, from the fount of progress, can man rise to the sublimest heights of his destiny. R.

THE AGRARIAN QUESTION.

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(Continued from last issue)

In those places, however, where the relics of the feudal system still prevail the landlord's privileges give rise to special forms of exploitation, such as "serfdom" and the system of giving half of the produce to the landlord when a part of the soil belongs to the large estates.

In countries where large landholdings are insignificant in number, while a great number of small tenants are in search of land, there the distribution of the large holdings can prove a sure means of winning the peasantry for the revolution, while the preservation of the large estates can be of no value for provisioning of the towns. The first and most important task of the proletarian state is to secure a lasting victory. The proletariat must put up with a temporary decline of production so long as it makes for the success of the revolution. Only by persuading the middle peasantry to maintain a neutral attitude, and by gaining the support of a large part, if not the whole, of the small peasantry, can the lasting maintenance of the proletarian power be secured.

At any rate, where the land of the large owners is being distributed, the interests of the agricultural proletariat must be of primary consideration.

The implements of large estates must be converted into state property, absolutely intact, but on the unflinching condition that these implements be put at the disposal of the small peasants gratis, subject to conditions worked out by the proletarian state.

If just at first after the proletarian coup d'etat the immediate confiscation of the big estates becomes absolutely necessary, and moreover also the banishment or internment of all landowners as leaders of the counter-revolution and relentless oppressors of the whole rural population, the proletarian state, in proportion to its consolidation not only in the towns, but in the country as well, must systematically strive to take advantage of all the forces of this class, of all those who possess valuable experience, learning, organizing ability, and must use them (under special control of the most reliable Communist workers) to organize large agriculture on Socialist principles.

7.—The victory of Socialism over capitalism, the consolidation of Socialism, will be definitely established at the time when the proletarian state power, after having finally subdued all resistance of the exploiters and secured for itself a complete and absolute submission, will reorganize the whole industry on the base of wholesale collective production and a new technical basis (founded on the electrification of agriculture). This alone will afford a possibility of such a radical help in the technical and the social sense, accorded by the town to the backward and dispersed country, that this help will create the material base for an enormous increase of the productivity of agriculture and general farming work, and will incite the small farmers by force of example and for their own benefit, to change to large collective machine agriculture.

Most particularly in the rural districts a real possibility of successful struggle for Socialism requires in the first place that all Communist Parties inculcate in the industrial proletariat the consciousness of the necessity of sacrifice on its part, and the readiness to sacrifice itself for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie; and the consolidation of the proletariat is based on its ability to organize and to lead the working and exploited masses, and on the vanguard being ready for the greatest sacrifices and for heroism. In the second place a possibility of success requires that the laboring and most exploited masses in the country experience an immediate and great improvement of their position caused by the victory of the proletariat, and at the expense of the exploiters. Unless this is done, the industrial proletariat cannot depend on the support of the rural districts, and cannot secure the provisioning of the towns with food-stuffs.

8.—The enormous difficulty of the organization
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