

By the Way

MY proletarian shiftlessness undertook to write these notes instead of set articles, thinking thus to escape much labor in composition and study. It were easy thought I, to dash off in spare moments now and then notes of comment spiced occasionally with sly malice towards what I presume to think are Utopianisms lingering on among fellow Socialists. I would make no frontal attacks. No! My strategy was to be one of indirection, harrying the Utopian, deeply entrenched in his preconceptions, conducting demoralizing raids on his bases of opinion, all under cover of innocent looking comments on men and things. So my naive duplicity proposed. But, O Lord, in an unguarded moment I said I would deal with the "nationalization of land" proposal of the British Labor Party, and the more I have thought about the matter since, the more I realize what a mare's nest of troubles I have laid myself open to. It is not altogether the scope of the subject, about which discussion has been carried on for generations and upon which whole libraries have been and may yet be written. What chiefly troubles me it that the subject forces me into the open on the question of social reform and many things else; it compels me, prematurely, to expose a position I had intended to mask awhile partly because I do not feel altogether sure of it. So, I am moved by anticipatory tremors and timidities, in imagination already I hear on the breeze the undiscriminating impossibilists traditional war cry: "Reforms do not reform, palliatives do not palliate!"

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Not wishing to arouse unwarranted hostility and thus have ears closed to my further argument, I may state in advance that, so far as I see, my attitude on reform involves no change in the Party in respect of its educational function or in its independence as a revolutionary political organization. It would however, it seems to me, entail a recognition that reform organizations, industrial and political, fulfil a necessary function, both for defense and attack, in the interest of the working masses and therefore entail an attitude on our part towards them pedagogical, critical as occasion warrants, but fundamentally friendly as to organs of the workers in the fields where lie their immediate political and economic interests. As almost a necessary corollary to that attitude, the concept of **function** should be substituted for that of **principle**, as distinguishing one organization from another. What modernized mind but deplors the wastes of mental effort in the unending, turgid, metaphysical logic-chopping over principles, a concept out of date even in the eighteenth century for the purpose in mind. What wonder the practically minded working class at large are perplexed at the animosities, recurring splits and divisions among its active elements and fail to understand the metaphysics that are the occasion. And—whisper it not in Gath—neither do the doctors. Listen in on us when two—two, not three, two is enough—belonging to the same group are gathered together.

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Cast your eye over the cursed scene of anarchy in the so-called movement in Canada. Two cats or a dozen cats I think it is, over a clothes line exhibit the same kind of a movement. Are the working class apathetic! What wonder! But there is more than apathy. There is in them actual hatred and contempt for our anarchy, they realize it stands in

their way. Substitute, I say, the concept of function for that of principle and we should have a new spirit and a new order of things in the working class movement. Our organizations would be regarded as functional groups engaged in departmental activities, industrial, political and educational, in one great enterprise. Each functional group would attract those who by native bent were inclined to its form of activity. Mutual jealousies and suspicions would disappear or sink to a minimum. Individuals could go from the industrial or the political movement to the educational for a knowledge of theory and return to their own movements more efficient in the working class cause. The working class, seeing the active elements down to a workmanlike basis of function, a basis it could understand, would shed its apathy for an awakened and lively interest in all our affairs. On this matter, of course, I particularly address the rank and file, over the heads of individuals whose animosities have hardened them into mere feudists, or between whom the hard word has been passed which they can not forget. Not personalities, but a cause is at stake. Given the opportunity I may have more to say on this idealistic proposal in the future. There are, you know, two kinds of idealism, idealism and practical idealism.

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Well, having now committed myself, I must go more into detail. The way to get conclusions right is to start right in the premises, so they say. I want to traverse the premises. Though readers still disagree with me in the end, I hope that our going over the ground may still have some educational value as a by-product. Like any surveyor we need an instrument, the best possible. I recommend one below.

Someone has said, that it is the hall-mark of a civilized mind that it be capable of taking resurveys of its standards of judgment, testing them in the light of new experiences. One who should possess such a mind would be said to have an "objective mind" or to have the "scientific habit of mind." There is little doubt, then, that we are all more or less savages. In degree, for some limited uses it is present with us all, even with the primitive savage. Modern science, it might be said, has raised it in our day into the consciousness of mankind as a necessary attitude of mind for research. It is working "ideally" in enquiry when an idle curiosity is the only accompanying influence. Its achievements are mainly in the mechanical sciences and industrial activity. In the so-called social sciences the ideal is more difficult to attain because subjective influences, the self-deceptions of desire, the personal biases and predilections of the investigator colour his view and warp his judgment. In our courts of justice this trait of human nature is so well known that when witnesses agree too closely it is taken for granted there has been collusion. The freer play of the objective mind in the natural sciences and industry has resulted in man's control of natural forces and his power to produce growing apace, while in comparison his control over social forces lags far behind. It is true that science has accumulated a vast fund of knowledge concerning man and his society, but it can not be applied to the conduct of social affairs so long as the kind of mind that gathered the knowledge is absent from that field of activity.

What I have written on the character of the "objective" mind may infuse readers with a suspicion that perhaps their attitudes on many things, say for one, social reform, may not be the result entirely of rational considerations, and so incline them to their re-examination.

I have said that my point of view on reforms would entail a recognition of labor organizations dealing with immediate conditions as performing necessary functions in the interest of the working class. We have already recognized the economic organizations of our class as so functioning, but have withheld it from the political. Yet the workers have innumerable interests other than those concerning conditions of work and wages. Some of them are in the sphere of politics—State affairs—relations with foreign countries, and domestic affairs such as education, hygiene, recreations, State interference in industrial disputes and legal enactments affecting these disputes, etc. As the modern State evolves and adds to its original chief function of policeman more and more of economic and non-economic functions it becomes ever more necessary that the workers take a hand in political affairs as a class, not only to pursue a merely defensive policy but also to take the initiative in social affairs. The times demand, working class interests and the interests of society as a whole demand that working class activity take on not only an anti-capitalist character but also one of anti-capitalism. The full historical significance of the working class movement goes beyond the fact that it is a movement to free the workers from a position of economic subjection. It has also the task of freeing society and its means of life from class control, placing control in the hands of society as a whole. It is not by working class good-will, but by virtue of historical necessity that one aim embodies the other. There is more than an "ideal" necessity for social reconstruction, i.e., for the transferring of society's means of production from private to social control. Modern large-scale machine production and the world market signify socialized production and a universal dependence on its operation. Production, however, rests conditionally on production for profit for a class who own the means of production. It is this condition of production that has brought into play the driving force of necessity for the transferring of productive powers to social control. Even the bourgeoisie must yield before the pressure or break. But they yield reluctantly and ever seek to escape necessity through national success in commerce or in war at the expense of rival nations. As a consequence, the very existence of civilization is said to be threatened. The producing populations are threatened with an increasing measure of poverty and degradation that bodes no good, in the opinion of those who believe as I do, that a strong, virile working class, mentally and physically, is the chief hope of the social revolution. That is why "ideally," the producing masses, both urban and rural should become initiating factors in social change; it is also why, of a historically developed necessity, they **must**.

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But even though society should escape by chance a worse fate and under State necessity changes that are adaptations to new conditions be made by capitalist class parties, sheer economic necessity will continue to dog the heels of the masses of humanity. With, however, the producing masses entering in as an initiating force, while it will still be, as ever, "first things first" and "next things next," a transitional period entailed not alone by mental, but also by technical facts, their purpose will not be a mere existence, but well-being. The removal of obstructions to its attainment will be of another kind marked by an increasing revolutionary significance as knowledge of the social problem increases derived from practical experience and education.

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The work of scientific Socialists, is educational. To be true to name and function consists, not, it seems to me, in lumping reforms in one indiscriminate mass, but of analysing and classifying them as their elements, reactionary, meliorative or revolutionary, may indicate. So that, as the case may be, the working masses may understand the momentous significance of their political acts.

If these notes get in the "Clarion" I shall take it as a charter of liberty to say more along these lines in the next issue before dealing with the "Nationalization of Land" reform. C.