

What Is Political Action?

HERE appears to be quite a little misunderstanding abroad as to the precise meaning of the term Political Action. There are those who would interpret it as pure Parliamentarism—the use of the ballot, the election of Socialists or those professing sympathy with Socialist doctrines to parliament. It is a fact that such action is Political Action. It is also a fact that the horse is a four-legged animal. But the horse is not the only four-legged animal. Neither is Parliamentarism the only form of Political Action.

Politics is the art of Government. Anything is Political that has reference to Government or the method and conduct of Government.

When a man like 'Gene Debs, for instance, makes a speech criticizing the conduct of the Government or advocating a change in the method of Government he is, if the Government choose so to consider it, guilty of a 'Political' offence and becomes as we have seen a 'Political' prisoner.

Political action then is:

1. Any action taken by the State in exercise of its authority.
2. Any action by any individual or group of individuals directed against the State with intent to influence its policy or to challenge, and in the last resort to completely usurp, its authority.

Thus it will be obvious that, when any individual (to whom the State has graciously granted the privilege) drops (at the time appointed by the State) into a box (provided by the State) a paper (prepared by the State) marked in a manner which he fondly imagines will influence the policy of the State—that is Political Action. Or, when some haggard-eyed, addle-pated believer in the 'propaganda of the deed' drops a bomb down Mr. Borden's smoke stack, naively thinking that by so doing he will influence the policy of the State, that is Political Action.

If this were all there was to Political Action we would be inclined to agree with those who insist that it is 'no good.' But:—

When a body of working men to the number of two million or more issue an ultimatum to the State demanding that the State withdraw its troops from Russia and thus bring to a close a campaign which can not even be dignified by the name of War since war has not even been declared, and—

When those same two million workers demand that the coal mines which were originally stolen from the people shall be taken over and held in trust for the people.

That is an attempt to influence the policy and challenge the authority of the State and that is Political Action.

And in the event of those same two million workers reinforced by several millions more taking action to completely usurp the authority of the State, that will be Political Action.

Thus it may be seen that Political Action covers a multitude of things good and bad. Some would confine it entirely to Parliamentarism. Others insist that it means the action of an enslaved class working for emancipation. The term includes both of these things but refuses to be restricted to either of them. We are sorry to disappoint these gentlemen, but words have meanings and the facts are against them.

It may be asked 'Why confine yourselves to Political Action. Is there no other way by which the workers may gain emancipation?'

The answer is emphatically 'No'—for the very simple and all-sufficient reason that any action taken by the working class to emancipate itself must necessarily be directed against the class which holds it in bondage and that class is represented by the State. Thus the struggle for emancipation must necessarily be fought on the political field.

As for Parliamentarism, under existing conditions, it is a farce. No one with a proper understanding of the nature of the State can consider it otherwise.

The function of the State is to Govern—note that word 'Govern.' There are those who imagine the term to be synonymous with 'administer,' 'direct,' 'organize.' They delude themselves. To Govern means to control—to possess and to use power over those governed.

A Society which could freely elect certain of its members to organize and direct its activities, and which, moreover, could at any time recall any or all of those elected and replace them with others—such a Society would not be 'Governed.' It would be administered. Capitalist society, however, is Governed. We need cherish no illusions upon that point. Our masters do not.

Government implies the existence of two distinct classes in society—that class which by virtue of its power governs, and that class which by reason of its helplessness or ignorance submits to be governed.

We have not the power to freely elect certain of our members to administer our affairs. Those who think we have delude themselves.

A 'Flivver' rattling along a country road passed a farmer driving a wagon.

"How much better of am I than that miserable animal the horse," said the flivver, proudly, to itself. "I am not tied to a clumsy wagon. There is no bit in my mouth. There are no guiding reins on me. I can go where I will. I am free."

Just ahead the road forked. "That road to the right looks good," said the flivver. "I will go that way."

At that moment something happened to the flivver's front wheel and it swung to the left. "Now there was a foolish trick it muttered, as it rattled along. "I fully intended to take that road to the right. However, this one is probably just as good."

And it is said that to this day the flivver does not realize that its freedom consists in being free to go wherever its driver chooses it shall go.

We can vote (if the State permits us and at such times as the State allows us) for any individual we choose. There is nothing to prevent our writing on our ballot 'Julius Caesar' or the name of the man who lives next door. But we can elect only those individuals whom the State chooses to permit.

At the last Dominion election there were certain individuals—mostly members of the Liberal party—whose election the State did not think desirable. But there was reason to believe that a large section of society intended to vote for those individuals. So the State promptly deprived a goodly portion of that section of the vote. There was another section of society which had never previously had the opportunity to vote, but which could be depended upon to vote the way the State wished. So the State promptly enfranchised that section. And all in a perfectly constitutional manner. Lord yes!

There are those who think that the Conservative party was responsible for that. They deceive themselves. It was something bigger and stronger than any party. It was something without which the Conservative or any other party is but a shadow. It was the Capitalist State.

In justice to ourselves it must be stated that it is not often that we display such alarming symptoms of 'the delusion of freedom.' We are too well trained. But there are a people living in and around Vladivostock in Siberia who recently conceived the most absurd ideas of the meaning of Political Freedom. They actually imagined it meant the freedom to elect whom they choose.

Under the supervision of the armed forces of the Allies, those people held an election in Vladivostock. Out of candidates representing eighteen different parties they elected all Bolsheviks. And

INDIA.

Sir Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet and philosopher, has requested the Viceroy of India to relieve him of the "honor" of knighthood as a protest against the recent outrages committed against Indian people in the Punjab in the name of "Law and Order."

ECONOMISTS (?)

Some economists (?) in dealing with the great social unrest suggest as a solution, more production. They forget or pretend to forget, the market. Production, under capitalism, must wait on the market. If the market will absorb goods at a profit to the capitalist producer there will be no lack of goods on the market. In saying that, if more were produced than there would be more goods to share around, they, the economists (?), talk as though we were producing for use in the co-operative Commonwealth in which the whole of the people owned the means of production. Ask the capitalist producer why he is not employing more hands and machinery and he will tell you that his orders do not warrant him in doing so. This is the capitalist system of production for sale under which we have as its natural outcome—a contradiction. That is that though labor, mental and physical, produces all wealth from the resources of the earth, yet we have forced on us by the economic laws of the system a huge unemployed army of potential wealth producers, because the market can not absorb all the products we are capable of producing. The working class live to work for the increase of capital and do not work to live.

they elected them by a vote which outnumbered the combined vote of the other seventeen. But the Capitalist State represented by the Allies did not approve of the Bolsheviks. So the election was declared null and void.

There are those who think that we have the right to vote. They would probably be surprised to hear that there is no such thing as the right to vote. That point was thrashed out long, long ago and was decided by the State acting through its courts of law. If the reader will look up 'Suffrage' or 'Franchise' in any reputable encyclopedia he will find that the vote is not a right vested in the individual but is a privilege which may be granted by the State and, by the same token may be revoked by the State.

The function of the State is to govern in accordance with the interests of the class it represents—the master class. The primary interest of the master class is to remain master. If any man thinks he can use a vote exercised by permission of the master class to force that master class to relinquish its power, he is indeed a naive and ingenuous soul.

When the first man has succeeded in lifting himself by his bootstraps; when it has become customary for a gambler to supply his opponent with the funds necessary to break him; when it is the accepted procedure for one nation to supply munitions to another nation with which it is at war; then and not till then will it be reasonable to suppose that a master class is going to voluntarily furnish its slaves with the means to overthrow it.

All this must not be taken as implying the ballot is useless. There is probably no question of policy or procedure upon which two opinions are not possible. There is probably no fairer way of deciding such questions than in accordance with the will of the majority. And there is certainly no better method yet devised of ascertaining the will of the majority than by the ballot. But not a ballot that is at the mercy of such abominations as 'The War Times Election Act.' A franchise which admits of such things as that is not a franchise, it is a force. Before we can hope to win economic freedom by the franchise we must first have the franchise. We do not possess it. First catch your hare.

C. K.