

# THE RED FLAG

A Journal of News and Views Devoted to the Working Class.

Published When Circumstances and Finances Permit  
By The Socialist Party of Canada.

401 Pender Street East, Vancouver, B. C.

Editor ..... C. Stephenson

SATURDAY ..... JUNE 7, 1919

## The Function of the Socialist Party

AT the Sunday evening propaganda meetings of the Socialist Party of Canada it is customary for the speaker of the evening to devote a part of the time to answering questions submitted by the audience. Any regular attendant at these meetings cannot help but be familiar with a certain question which, in the matter of persistent recurrence, threatens to rival the decimal with a dot over it. Like Banquo's ghost "it will not down."

The question referred to, while appearing under different forms and diversities of camouflage, is, in general import, something like this: "How do the Socialists propose to overthrow the present system, and what system will they set up in its place?"

This thing bears whiskers a yard long and they are hoary with age. The time is long since when it should have been laid to rest. It is a matter for astonishment that a person can be found with sufficient intelligence to string words together to form a sentence who will stand up in a public meeting and propound this aged joke. This question suggests that the person propounding it entertains the idea that the Socialists have a nice compact little "system" all fixed up and ready to run on the pressing of a button; and that, so soon as they can persuade a sufficient number of the credulous proletariat to assist and protect them in their sinister design, they intend to sneak up on the present system under cover of darkness, beat it over the head, drag it out, set up their own "system" in its place, press the button—and the thing is done.

It is a fact that at one time such weird idea as this was held by a number of people who called themselves Socialists. It is also a fact that at one time large numbers of people believed that the earth was flat. There are no doubt some small children and imbeciles living in the present day who hold to the idea that the moon is made of green cheese. But that any person of mature age, in full possession of his or her faculties and living in this twentieth century, seventy-two years after the formulation of "The Materialistic Interpretation of History," can be so profoundly ignorant of the nature and causes of social movements as this question suggests, is indeed a sorrowful thought. However, so long as this question continues to crop up it must be squarely met and its implications emphatically repudiated.

The Socialists do not propose to overthrow the present system; neither have they any ready-made system to offer in its place. No matter what peculiar ideas may have been held by those calling themselves Socialists in the "dear, dead days beyond recall," modern Socialism dating from the works of Marx and Engels stands foursquare and solid on the impregnable rock of scientifically acquired knowledge, and it is no exaggeration to state that every new discovery in the realms of science but serves to strengthen the position assumed by the Scientific Socialist. And no person having any claim to the title of Scientific Socialist has ever preached such a doctrine as this ques-

tion implies, nor anything remotely resembling it. No one knows better than the Socialist that society does not move at the behest of any individual or group of individuals but in response and in accordance with all the contributing factors and circumstances. Socialists do not pretend to initiate social movements. None know better than they the futility of such endeavor. They do, however, seek to understand them and to anticipate them. In the light of their knowledge of the nature and causes of social movements and their analysis of present-day conditions, the Socialists are enabled to anticipate the social revolution in which society will change its economical basis. They can see it coming. And they welcome it for they know that by this change society will purge itself of those objectionable features which arise out of the present economic basis and are rapidly becoming intolerable.

A question that here naturally suggests itself might be worded somewhat like this: "If, then, social movements are beyond the control of individuals or groups of individuals, what useful purpose is served by such organizations as the Socialist Party?" In answering this question we must consider the factors which determine a social movement of the nature of that in which we are interested. Broadly they will fall into two divisions: the material factors or the economic conditions which environ society, and the intellectual factors or society's understanding of its economic basis. The principle upon which the production and distribution of the necessities of life is carried on in any given society constitutes that society's economic system. Such a system exists for the specific purpose of providing the necessities of life for the members constituting that society. As long as the great mass of society remains convinced that the economic system under which it exists is capable of meeting its ever increasing requirements, so long will that system continue. The requirements of society may in many instances actually not be met. There may be starvation and destitution more or less widespread and consequently strikes, food riots and what is often lightly referred to as "industrial unrest," but these latter will be nothing more than efforts to force the existing system to respond more generously and thus constitute a tacit admission that the system is still held to be capable of so responding. So long as this opinion is held by the great bulk of society there will be no conscious movement toward the abolition of the existing system. On the other hand, just so soon as society is awakened to the realization that the existing system is no longer capable of meeting its requirements the doom of that system is sealed. length of time during which such a system will continue in existence after the first dawning of the realization of its incapability will depend almost entirely upon the speed with which this realization permeates society.

Right here the function of the Socialist Party stands revealed. Its function is to awaken the masses to a realization of the fact that the existing economic system is incapable of responding to their needs. In a word, education.

It is frequently asked in a more or less deprecatory spirit: "Why confine yourselves to education? Is there nothing more the Socialist Party can do?"

The answer is emphatically "No! There is nothing more the Socialist Party can do." And, moreover, there is nothing more that any working class organization can do. Over the material conditions the working class have practically no control whatsoever and never will have so long as they remain slaves. The intellectual factor is the only one over which they have any influence and even in that domain they have a hard, hard row to hoe.

It must be understood, however, that education—which, in the language of the proletariat, means class consciousness and what inevitably follows upon class consciousness, namely, class solidarity—can be, and is being, accomplished in many dif-

ferent ways. The Socialist Party has its particular methods, namely, propaganda meetings and the distribution of literature. Labor unions, craft or industrial, revolutionary or otherwise, consciously or unconsciously, are all contributing their quota insofar as they educate the masses to a realization of their position in human society. Strikes, riots, industrial disputes, or incipient revolutions contribute nothing toward the downfall of capitalism except inasmuch as they promote class-consciousness and class solidarity. Understanding this principle a class-conscious worker will approve or disapprove of a strike or any form of industrial action, so-called, according as he conceives the degree of class consciousness and solidarity which such action will promote to be worth whatever hardship may be involved.

Education is, in the final analysis, all that any working-class organization can consciously contribute toward the downfall of capitalism. And it is all that is necessary. For education means class consciousness, class consciousness creates class solidarity, class solidarity breeds militancy and it is out of these that the form and technique of revolution will take shape according to the needs of the moment. As to just when that moment will be no man can say more than that it looms perilously near.

C. K.

### THE VANCOUVER TYPOS

The Vancouver branch of the typographical union voted a majority of 71 to 55 in favor of going out on sympathetic strike in support of the workers of Winnipeg. However, it was decided by the local to refuse to handle any strike news which, in their opinion, misrepresented the facts. The printers are on the inside of this business of making up "news" and they revolted when more of the "stuff" was handed in to them for composition. The refusal of the publishers of the daily press to submit to this constitutes an admission that "faking" is part of their stock in trade.

We are informed that the first copy turned down by them was the product of the press correspondent, G. C. Porter, the individual who was responsible for the despatches sent out from Thief River Falls, during the first week of the strike, giving circumstantially worked-up details of horrible conditions prevailing in Winnipeg. This man bears one of the most unsavory reputations as to his treatment of labor troubles in his reports. He is an old offender and is known from coast to coast as notoriously unfair to labor and a trouble-maker. Yet knowing him for what he was, the press published his ridiculous "dope," that the Winnipeg strike was the part of a deliberate plan to commence seizing the powers of government in Canada, for the taking over the industries and the establishment of the Proletarian dictatorship. Winnipeg was already controlled by a Soviet of the workers and we forget what horrible fate had been meted out to the Mayor and Council. Babies were dying for want of milk, etc., etc., etc.

## SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

PROPAGANDA MEETINGS

SUNDAY, JUNE 8

At 8 p.m. Sharp

EMPRESS THEATRE

Corner Gore and Hastings

Speaker ..... J. Harrington