

# Was Marx a Reformer?

BY J. A. McDONALD

**N**UMEROUS have been the attempts, in recent years, to pin the badge of reform on the lapel of Marx. Spargo, in his "Marxian Socialism and Religion," went so far as to emasculate the Communist Manifesto in order to produce a Marx of his own calibre. Hillquit, in several of his books, classifies Marx among the advocates of reform, while carefully refraining from any quotations that would support his contention.

Now, it is our comrade "C" who attempts to perform the Herculean task. His efforts are crowned with no more success than those of his predecessors in the same endeavor. Although we can unreservedly concede that "C" has made a more profound study of science and philosophy than either Spargo or Hillquit, yet his self-imposed labors have failed to attain the objective. The reason for all these failures is found in the fact that the works of Marx are not susceptible to such treatment.

Let us examine "C's" contribution. After quoting two whole pages of the preface to Cap., Vol. I. with four specially emphasized sentences, he sums up with the following statement: "If read carefully, my quotation shows that Marx was far from hostile to parliamentary procedures and reforms and did not regard them as necessarily inimical to the progress of the English working class, even when reforms were brought in under the auspices of the bourgeois parties. Indeed he expresses a desire for them in Germany as a necessary phase in the development of the German working class."

Now, who in the world ever contended that all social reforms were necessarily inimical to the progress of the working class? "C" has been a member of the S.P. of C. for some years. He has at his disposal all the party literature. May I ask him to point out where any official statement has ever been rendered to the effect that the Party considered all reforms inimical to working class progress?

If he can produce such a document, then he is surely entitled to his premise. If not, then he is simply beating the air. We cannot eliminate the human factor and proceed with an argument. It requires at least two to conduct a debate.

I will shoulder the responsibility of stating that the Party has never been anti-reform, but rather anti-capitalism. Every propagandist, to my knowledge, has admitted that certain reforms, under certain conditions, may prove conducive to working class progress. If we find them useful we adapt them to our needs as a class.

But this concession by no means implies that our energies should be directed to striving after remedial legislation. Here is where "C's" postulate falls to the ground. He assumes that Marx was a reformer instead of a revolutionist.

There is no desire on my part to enter into a quibbling competition over the fine points of distinction between reform and revolution, nor to show, Dietzgen-like, that a reformer is a revolutionist and vice-versa. The generally accepted definition will suffice. The differences between the position of revolutionist and reformer are well exemplified in the Labor Party and the Socialist Party.

What, then, was the attitude of Marx? Was his stand synonymous with that of MacDonald, Schiedeman, Vandervelde, Branting and other errand boys of the bourgeoisie? Or did he take up a clear, definite revolutionary position and leave the extension of reforms to the ruling class, whose citadel was being bombarded?

Any student, who has paid strict attention to the teachings of Marx, should have little difficulty in arriving at a conclusion. A perusal of the animated pages of the Communist Manifesto, the Criticism of the Gotha Program, the Civil War in France or the Eighteenth Brumaire, leaves little doubt of the fact that "C" is up in the air.

Space prohibits a lengthy series of quotations from the works mentioned, but the final paragraph

of the Manifesto can be taken as a good example of where Marx stood. Here it is—"The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling class tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." (Special emphasis superfluous.)

To substantiate his point of view, "C" promised to quote Marx and Engels. Not a line was adduced from the works of Marx. All we are given is a vague, indefinite quotation from Engels' preface to Cap., Vol. III, written back in 1894. This selection means nothing. At that time there were no labor parties as such. The English Labor Party did not have its inception till years afterwards. Engels was obviously referring to organizations like the S.D.F., which had at that time an avowed revolutionary objective. He termed them both labor parties in the same way that we could call the Socialist Party a party of labor representing the working class.

As to Marx on parliamentary procedure, well that is another story. Marx well understood the value of parliamentary action to the revolutionary movement. Quotations much more emphatic in this respect than the one given by "C" could be introduced to present his attitude. But this is unnecessary as the point is not in dispute.

A few facts, however, will not be amiss as to the introduction and operation of the Factory, and Factory Extension Acts. It must not be thought that those Acts were the result of working class pressure or capitalist generosity. They were the outcome of the inter-action of a complicated series of factors. The struggle between landlord and capitalist and later, similar conflicts between the various sections of the capitalist class made it possible for certain benefits to accrue to the workers.

Neither can it be contended that those acts detrimentally effected capitalist development. On the contrary the opposite was the case. The report of the factory inspector, 1865, states—"The inconveniences we expected to arise from the introduction of the Factory Acts into our branch of manufacture, I am happy to say, have not arisen. We do not find the production at all interfered with; in short, we produce more in the same time" (Cap. vol. 1, p. 522) Where the Acts did pinch the capitalist he found means of circumventing them. (See Cap. vol. 1, p. 265.)

As for the differences between English and German conditions regarding reforms of this nature, had Marx been writing thirty years later his conclusions would have been vastly amended. The greatest of all socialist reformers—Bismarck—found favorable conditions, following the Franco-Prussian War, for placing on the statute books legislation of a nature much more advanced than anything found in England or elsewhere. The Workmen's Compensation Act, the Old Age Pensions Act, etc., all had their birth in Germany and not England. But even these drastic measures and almost six years of social democratic administration have not solved the workers' problem. They still have need of a forcible revolution to abolish capitalism and its hideous effects.

Now, I am asked to present my "point of view" on the British Labor Government. With pleasure! But would it not be apropos to have, first of all, the S. P. of C. "point of view?" Regardless of its anti-working class character, the advent of a Labor Government was a great event. Practically every working class organization in the English speaking world has voiced its opinion either in favor or opposed.

It has been officially admitted that the many contributions of "C" present what the Party does not stand for. What could be more appropriate than an article showing what it does consider in this respect? Such an effort might obviate the necessity

of my "point of view." Being official it would have greater influence.

Of course, references of a vague, non-committal kind have been made in the editorial columns from time to time, but the whole policy of the Clarion has been to pussy-foot across the issue while allowing "C" to wander in the paths of reform without as much as an editor's note to caution him, or show the erroneous nature of his numerous "By-the-Ways." For the past couple of years the Party has been in reality the S. P. of "C."

It is time we turned a new leaf. To function properly in the revolutionary movement, a Party must be something more than an economic class. It must drive home a scientific conception of the class struggle, and strive to lead the workers into those channels, which history has shown to be best adapted to a revolutionary purpose. This the S. P. of C. has lately failed to do. The failure is reflected in the present disintegration of the Party.

## PLATFORM

### Socialist Party of Canada

We, the Socialist Party of Canada affirm our allegiance to, and support of the principles and programme of the revolutionary working class.

Labor, applied to natural resources, produces all wealth. The present economic system is based upon capitalist ownership of the means of production, consequently, all the products of labor belong to the capitalist class. The capitalist is, therefore, master; the worker a slave.

So long as the capitalist class remains in possession of the reins of government all the powers of the State will be used to protect and defend its property rights in the means of wealth production and its control of the product of labor.

The capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-swelling stream of profits, and to the worker, an ever increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in setting itself free from capitalist exploitation by the abolition of the wage system, under which this exploitation, at the point of production, is cloaked. To accomplish this necessitates the transformation of capitalist property in the means of wealth production into socially controlled economic forces.

The irrepressible conflict of interest between the capitalist and the worker necessarily expresses itself as a struggle for political supremacy. This is the Class Struggle.

Therefore we call upon all workers to organize under the banner of the Socialist Party of Canada, with the object of conquering the political powers for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic programme of the working class, as follows:

- 1—The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railroads, etc.) into collective means of production.
- 2—The organization and management of industry by the working class.
- 3—The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use instead of production for profit.

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