

WESTERN CLARION

A JOURNAL OF
CURRENT
EVENTS

Official Organ of
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
PHILOSOPHY

837

Twice a Month

VANCOUVER, B. C., FEBRUARY 15, 1921

FIVE CENTS

"Charity"

SHE was a most charming lady. Only a hardened cynic could resist the appeal of so winsome a personality. And there are not many hard-boiled cynics. And that is why this pretty society maid collected a dollar each from the "help" assembled at their noon meal.

"It is for such a worthy cause," she explained, and this appeal for the orphan children in the Industrial Home's annual drive for funds, coupled with the compelling smile, and the sweet perfume radiating from her gracious presence, got the money.

Except from the "cynic," the "crass materialist." He is really quite sentimental, when fairly started on a discourse on humanity's sufferings. But he refused point blank to part with a dollar.

No smile could budge him, nor pouting lips, and the lady left him to the loudly voiced disapproval of his work mates.

"Shameful, I call it," sniffed the impish waitress, who attended movies regularly, and as regularly registered emotion in pantomime all through her working day.

"Nice way to treat a lady," said another.

"Can't even part with a dollar for the poor kids."

So it came a fusillade of hostile comment, on his parsimony.

The sinner sat unmoved, rolled a pill, lit up, inhaled the smoke, and as he blew out the cloud, grunted: "Hell. You make me tired."

"Well," said the foreman; "I don't blame them; you could surely have chipped in, and never missed the coin, and at the same time kept in with the crowd."

"Quite so," came back the cynic. "Just the same, if this collector hadn't been a swell looking dame, she wouldn't have got half what she did, lots of you fellows didn't want to part with the money, but just couldn't turn down the lady."

Several guilty blushes among the young fellows, seemed to bear him out.

"Well, there was Jack," (indicating a man who went out), "he came through, and he's a married man with two kids, and a sick woman, but he had a heart big enough for the others too."

(This from the housekeeper).

The cynic smiled. "I don't want to be hard on Jack, but it is a fact that jobs are scarce, and as you said, there are three links on his chain."

"Chain!" I said nothing of the kind. The ideal referring to a man's family as his chain. Shame on you!"

"All right. Call it a family if you want to. A rose smells the same by any name, and a man can be held fast by chains of duty, as well as chains of hunger, or steel."

"Now, see here," went on the speaker, warming up to his subject, "let us look at this business closer."

"Supposing a hold-up man came in with a gun and cleaned up on us, leaving most here without carfare home. Don't you think it would be right and proper that he should pass the hat round among us, so that any spare dimes he missed, could be donated to the one lacking carfare?"

Cries of amazement, and ironic laughter greeted this.

"You laugh. Very good, but what difference is there between such a performance and the one we just took part in?"

"Why! a whole lot. You don't mean to say, the lady ever held us up, do you?" came the demand.

"Not individually; she is but one of a gang," was the answer. "Every one of us in this room, belongs to one particular class in society; the working class, do we not?"

"Yes, but what's that got to do with it?"

"Wait a bit, and you'll see. Do we, any of us own our job?" was the next query.

"We do not," he went on, "so we find two facts there to start on. We are members of a working class, and that class does not own the job they work on, nor further, the tools or machines they work with."

"This brings us to the question: 'Who does own these so necessary things?'"

"And that brings us to the lady. She is known as a society lady; none of you ever knew her or her kind to work for a living, nor yet their men folk. Yet they are humans, like you and me. Equally with us, they need the trinity of food, clothing and shelter. And I leave it to you, if they are not well fed, well clothed, and well sheltered? I'll say they are. Not only that, but while we bump along in street cars, on our way to cheap movies, they roll by on smooth concrete roads, in beautiful cars on their way to expensive shows. They can and do get the best music, they, at least, have also, far better opportunities to improve their minds by contact with the best authors, scientific thinkers, though I will claim they make but poor use of that opportunity."

All that did not proceed so smoothly as written. Interruptions were frequent; sneering remarks, and cheap ridicule, came plentifully. But no one could reply, when challenged, to refute these plainly seen facts.

"So now," he went on, "we have a third fact to add to the first two, namely, that we have a working class job-less and tool-less, and on the other hand a leisure or idle class, that works not at all, and yet never seems to have such a terrible task 'getting by.'"

"You never see their children in the 'homes' they collect for. And I ask you, what do you deduce from these facts? Is it not plain, that if this idle class lives so well, and lounges around so luxuriously, yet never works, that some one must support them?"

Without labor, the machines could not run. With no machines running, no food, clothes, or shelter would be secure for long.

And who furnishes the labor? If one class monopolizes leisure and luxury, which come from labor applied to the machines, does not the other class, our class, the wage workers, you and I in this room being a portion of it, monopolize the labor?

We do; and there you are.

Can you explain this riddle?

Are you beginning to see the likeness to the hold-up man?

If the job-less workers wish to exist, they must ask the job-owning idlers for permission to work at their machine. That is what they do, but you've never noticed any of us well-worked and poorly cared for workers accumulate a fortune. Some few of us, who were cool enough to see the situation,

stayed single, and by steady work and skimping have risen a yard or so out of the morass. But the bulk of us have slaved all our lives, and worn away most of our energy, added to our burden by way of a family, consequently have dependents to work for besides ourselves.

We submit to our conditions, and work, for the most part, on our master's terms."

"That's so." "It's true," came the remarks now.

"It's not right, nor just, the way we are treated."

"Why not?" shot back the speaker instantly.

"What, you mean to say that this other kind of people have a right to do this to us? Is it just and moral for them to take what we make?"

"Decidedly it is; they take the wealth you make and give back as little as they can get away with. If you die, and your children are thrown on charity, they place them in a home, and pass the hat around among your mates, and ask you to be generous, for humanity's sake, and the most of you dig up and damn fellows like me who see through the sham."

They have a legal right to do what they do. The Supreme Court of the U. S. upholds the right of the employer to 'impose conditions upon those who seek employment.'

They have a moral right, because every authority on these matters, including the holy men of the churches, uphold them in the ownership of the means of life.

They are justified by law and church, and lastly, and most clinchingly; what more justification is needed, when we see our fellow workers vigorously uphold the right of individuals to own what is commonly needed, and make profit thereby?

We confine our squabbling to disputing with the other class, and our fellow slaves as to how much food, clothing and shelter we shall be allowed.

We are more intent on pinching our wages (the equivalent for our needs) to get savings, so as to get on the land, individually, and escape from our position (for, none of us like it).

Those who get on the land, clamor for relief, and form leagues,—to get the idlers off society's back! Oh, no. To get a larger share of the wealth, to have less taxes on their farms, in short, they want a better chance to become idlers themselves. Then again, some workers' organizations may have cloudy phrases about production of wealth for the benefit of all, but we workers have got to realize that while the ownership of all wealth is in the hands of the idle capitalists, sanctioned by us, mark you, so long as we leave it there, unchallenged, just so long will it be the gun at our heads, because owning nothing, and still having all the human wants and desires, we are at their mercy, and we deserve to be.

The foreman had gone out, and now returned with the boss. The latter spoke up at once.

"That's enough there, you Bill. There's too much of this Bolshevik talk going around, and I want it to stop. We have freedom and liberty in this country, and there's no need for any of you foreigners coming here, and shooting off like you do. So that's all there is to it.

Either cut it out, or get your time." And it was so. He got it, and lived happy ever after."

F. S. F.