

The Cause of Social Change

HISTORY is not a mere chronology—a table of doings of political factions, successive royalities, conquering heroes or struggling patriots. It is an infinitely weightier matter, and carries a far deeper significance. It is, in reality a record of man's social development, the processional of economic progress which is the cause of the continual shuffling on the checker-board of society.

Our classical histories, unfortunately, deal largely with the spectacular in the march of events, and ignore, or are ignorant of the gallant deeds they relate. Harold Fairhair vowed to cut neither hair nor nail (or some such rash oath) until he was ruler of a majesty sufficiently attractive to his ladylove; but the imposition of "scot" upon the surrounding tribes was a more cogent reason than the favor of his Norse maiden. The "romance" and "misfortune" of Queen Mary has awakened many a tale of imagination, yet the "romance" lay in the preservation of the *status quo* of privilege, i.e., living on plunder, and the "misfortune" was her inability to co-ordinate the various factions around her, all striving in the same "romance," the continued slavery of the Scotch peasant. Urban II. preached the first crusade for the capture of the Holy Sepulchre, but he cared as much, really, for the Holy Sepulchre as I for Mahomet's turban. The subjugation of Leo in the Eastern Empire was nearer his heart. Napoleon drove the Austrians from Italy in the name of "freedom," and made excursion on Egypt on the same pretext, but possession of the trade route to the east was more like the fact. Germany, in our own day entered the lists for the same far east, under the banner of "freedom" for Russia from Czardom. Britain, and, later, America, contended for the same east, one under the flag of "the rights of small nations," the other, to "make the world safe for democracy." One can have nothing but the bitterness of scorn for the miserable subterfuge of statecraft.

To live, man must eat, and the manner in which he gains that livelihood mainly determines the character and institutions of the state of society at any period of time prevailing. But the same state of society cannot maintain itself forever. It may endure a long time, but that particular form comes to an end. Slow as evolution seems, it ever goes on, bringing in its train new modifications, new energies, and in consequence, new ideology. And because of the disintegrating effect of new forces proceeding out of its inevitable growth upon the form of society which generated the new form, the urgent need of new exigencies compels the dissolution of the old social life as inexorably as the bursting bud displaces the withered leaf. The conflict cannot be staged; it is the law of the cosmos—the law of being and becoming, and that conflict will hurl down to disaster whatever form of society is not in conformity with the productive forces within itself.

But how do the productive forces become out of harmony with the society in which they grew? How does natural law abrogate what it has brought into being? And the answer is: cosmic progress: the throbbing and urge of the passionless law of change.

The inception of the political state synchronizes with military aggression. The appearance, therefore, of government, not only broke down the old tribal associations, but also introduced new impulses of social being, new ideas based upon the new historic environment through which arose another manner of life—foreign to the old society. The military conqueror had to secure the object of his aggression—tribute, thereby changing the current of the thing produced. He had to defend himself from other aggressors who coveted that tribute. Hence, troops had to be levied, armed, fed and clothed. But levying troops involved official organization, a new feature in the social life. Equipping them with arms and clothes generated forms of production. As fighters, they were, not producers, yet, being mortal, their physical needs had to be appeased. All of

which not only created further division of labor, but further divisions of classes in the social body. Increase of population, itself a result of improvement in production, demanded yet more efficiency. Organized religion created still further divisions in society, and still further necessities for wider production.

In this manner, out of the material conditions of the day a particular political superstructure was built up, based upon the prevailing methods of wealth production. And because the old tribal usages clashed with instant necessities and menaced the safety and stability of the new social organism and its own necessary and particular method of life, tribal associations became a thing of the past. The tribal chief was transformed into the feudal lord; the village moot into the national parliament; the wandering tribesman and his tent into the local yeoman and his house; the whole fabric of society utterly changed.

But society did not stop growing. Excess population overtaxed the skill of the pastoralist, and agriculture received a forward impulse. Mineral deposits were discovered, bringing a new demand for labor. The historic voyages of the 16th century offered new necessities of conquest and labor. The crusaders touched the culture of the Saracens, thereby widening immensely the mental horizon. Printing became known; gunpowder was discovered; growth in every direction. Contact with strange peoples brought intercourse of new product; exchange of ideas, refinement of method, invention of mechanical appliances increased the volume of production; widening markets became a necessity, competition keener and sharper came to being; capital arose; change upon change, each one the effect of prior cause, each one the cause of subsequent effect.

But while all this social growth of production was progressively and continuously pressing onward, the old political organization was not. And just as before, the military aggressor found himself utterly at variance with tribal usage, founded on immemorial custom; so the new industrial aggressor found himself at variance with the law of the fief, founded upon the necessity of the conquering hero. And just as the military state collided with tribal organization, because of the imperious condition under which advancing society was compelled to procure the means of life, so, in the same manner, and for precisely the same reason capitalist democracy clashed with the feudal regime. And the feudal regime, of necessity, went down—because the nature of capitalist production was consonant with the developed social forces—by absorption as in England, by the red fury of '89 in France, both methods the result of the same force but differently influenced by local circumstances.

Capital hurled away feudal restrictions; tore down its trade barrages; trampled its charters and its rights; violated its institutions, threw its laws into the discard. And instead, it built up its own political superstructure, using its own methods, fighting with its own developing weapons, in accordance with its own ideals and necessities.

But again society stayed not. It progressed. Ownership passed from the man to the class, production from the individual to society. Collectivism became the new necessity of society, of its manner of living, social production displaced national society, with its narrow prejudices, its limited ideals, and forged the whole world into an international unity, with one single aim, economic freedom. But while production has become social, the distribution of the thing produced is still on the ancient terms of its now obsolete political superstructure. The statutes and constitutions of an ancient social form hamper the further progress of the new social development; bound it on all sides and directions, producing of course, its inevitable bitter fruit of social conflict,—the class struggle.

This struggle is, in reality the urgent necessity of society, under the compulsion of its evolved economic progression, of satisfying the material needs of life in a method or system of production which denies all access to the means of that satisfaction, unless under the terms imposed by capitalist production for profit—or in other words, unless the social forces of production yield to the capitalist class—which has appropriated the material and machinery of production—the entire product of industry, receiving in return the puny requisites of necessary life, food, clothing and shelter, society shall be denied all means of acquiring even that puny necessity. And since capital has no market, and therefore cannot produce the necessities of life, and since society has no access to the means of life, which are capitalist property, society in the midst of the bounteous plenty of its own industry, faces starvation.

This, then, is the cause of the coming social change. Socialized industry has brought capitalist anarchic profit production to an end, because the productive capacity of that industry has created a surplus far in excess of the world market demand, developed and exploited to its limit by capital. Hence capital without this market cannot feed its slaves. Yet since physical necessities must be satisfied the mighty and complicated machinery (political) of capital, now become a menace to society, must disappear before the new potency of the social society, the civilized commune, the only means under the historic circumstances of satisfying the life demands of modified society.

The historic condition is ripe for the change, the crucial hour has come. And while everywhere our masters are like the men among the tombs, groping along in the darkness of ignorance of their own system and its tremendous forces, frantic with fear of impending change striking, purposeless, like a rattlesnake at whatever comes within reach, for us, the producers, the future opens out sweetly as flowers to their life fountained sun, smiling with the teeming abundance of our skill and handiwork.

R.

Labor Defence Fund

Send all money and make all cheques payable to A. S. Wells, B. C. Federationist, Labor Temple, Vancouver, B. C.

Collection agency for Alberta: A. Broatch, 1203 Eighth Avenue East, Calgary, Alta.

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D. Campbell, \$1; Dick Burge, \$2; N. Schacter, \$1; G. R. Ronald, 45 cents; Jack Chapman, \$1; W. R. Lewin, \$1; Robert Burns, \$1; S. Wagner, \$1; Neil Shaw, \$1.

Total, 11th to 26th May, inclusive, \$9.45.

WHAT COMMERCE MEANS

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possession of those who have contributed nothing to its production. When too large a balance results to the exploiting section of one nation, as we see in the case of the U. S. and Europe, there must be a consequent cessation of trade for a period, together with a vast increase in the importation of articles of luxury, until what goes out approximately equals what comes in.

The whole system of trade and commerce, as well as all the pomp, glory and magnificence emanating from class ownership of the means of life, hinges on our ability to produce, and our inability to understand our miserable position. J. A. McD.