

# Political Representation

It is an axiom of political economy that all true political representation must be, and can only be based on definite economic interests.—Marx.

Second installment of chapter 3, Prof. Charles A. Beard's "Economic Basis of Politics."

The next issue will contain the first installment of chapter 2 of the same work. Chapter 2 has for its title "Economic Groups and the Structure of the State" and deals with the character of the grouping of the several economic interests of the national communities and the structure and working of the representative political system in the Middle Age on that basis. Aside from what these essays contain of a general educational value, I have obtained their publication in the Clarion specifically because of what I see as a tendency on the North American continent to a period of re-formation of the lines of political representation by economic groups. The tendency is to the formation of Labor Parties of the wage working interest, of Farmer Parties of the agricultural interest and the gradual merging of the Democratic and Republican Parties in the U. S. and the Liberals and Tories in Canada into a single bourgeois Party in each country by force of defection of farmers and wage-workers. Whether this tendency will develop and mature into a change of the present representative system with whose theory and philosophy, as Beard shows in this and the preceding installment Rousseau had so much to do is a matter for time to tell. But calling attention to my quotation from Marx, I say murder will out, important economic group interest will express itself, no matter how a political representation system departs from reality. In such case, however, there is lag, leak and friction. Better if the appropriate machinery is there to facilitate the translation of economic interest into social fact, as "R" might say. "C"

## DOCTRINE OF POLITICAL EQUALITY.

(Continued from last issue)

**I**NDEED, as we look at this system, it seems so unreal, so ill-adapted to the world of industry, and trade, commerce and agriculture, that its implications are astounding. We can hardly imagine how it could become the philosophy of any people. An examination into the course of events, however, makes the explanation clear.

Naturally enough Rousseau's philosophy did not appeal to the French clergy and nobility, who were aware of their interests and of their numerical inferiority. To them the social contract was poisonous and impious anarchy.

To the bourgeois, on the other hand, it presented a different aspect. They had grown powerful in numbers and wealth, and they felt keenly the oppressive privileges enjoyed by the clergy and nobility. They were determined to sweep away the discrimination against them, and to control the government in their own interests. If they did not contemplate the destruction of the clergy and the nobility as classes, they did contemplate levelling them down in their political and economic privileges. The clergy and the nobility had a monopoly of the philosophy of divine right—the moral support of their power. The bourgeois had to look elsewhere for a philosophy to justify such levelling as they contemplated. They found it in Rousseau's Social Contract. Searching for an ethical support for their attack upon two powerful groups, they exalted "the people" as against all special privileges. They were playing with fire and they knew it, but there seemed no other philosophy at hand to serve as a foil for their enterprise. Unwittingly they started a conflict, the consequence of which will last until the end of time.

In the shock of the French Revolution the bourgeois overthrew the nobility and the clergy. They abolished the feudal rights of the former and seized the property of the latter. In their fear of the privileged orders they established a legislature of one

chamber and sought to safeguard their property by a tax-paying qualification on the right to vote; but the logic of their position was fatal. They had proclaimed the rights of man as the moral justification for the destruction of the rights of two classes, and they had at the same time coolly repudiated the rights of man by limiting the application of the doctrine to their own class.

Then followed the Revolution of violence and terror in which radical leaders inflamed the disfranchised by appeals to the gospel of Rousseau and to the proclamations of the bourgeois. To save themselves the latter had to resort to that other great source of authority, the sword. This instrument was wielded by Napoleon Bonaparte, a man who understood the relation of property to political power, and who, through his constitution based on checks and balances, gave stability to bourgeois institutions. Even Napoleon, the Bourbons, and the Orleanists, however, could not stay the onward march of Rousseau and his legions.

But it may be asked, how did this levelling doctrine of universal political equality find a foothold in the United States where there were no official clergy and nobility to be overthrown by the third estate? Well, some writers have laboured hard to show that it is a French creation utterly at variance with Anglo-Saxon tradition—whatever that may mean. In the interest of truth, however, it should be said that the free-and-equal doctrine is not French, but English in origin. Its beginnings among English-speaking peoples may be traced to the flood of speculation that broke loose in England during the seventeenth century when the merchants and gentry were engaged in a revolt against the crown and aristocracy, the clergy having broken a century earlier by the bluff king, Henry VIII, who confiscated much of their property. It was from English defenders of revolution, like John Locke, rather than from French authors, that Jefferson derived the gospel of the Declaration of Independence. Moreover the economic circumstances in the United States were on the whole favorable to the propaganda of that word. There was no established clergy here. There was no titled aristocracy. There was no such proletariat as formed the "mob" of Paris. Land was the chief form of property and its wide distribution among the whites (leaving the slaves out of the account) brought about in fact a considerable economic equality to correspond to the theory of political equality.

Moreover, at the time that America was committed to the theory of political equality, the people were engaged in a revolt against the government imposed upon them under the authority of Great Britain. Like the third estate in France they needed some effective and compelling justification for their extraordinary conduct. Of course the leaders of the American Revolution could have said coldly: "We are fighting for the plantation owners of the South, the merchants and landed gentry of the North, and the free farmers in both sections, in order that they may govern themselves."

Obviously, such a chilly declaration of fact would not have thrilled the masses, especially the mechanics of the towns who enjoyed no political rights under either system, the old or the new. It was necessary to have something that would ring throughout the country. Hence the grand words of the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal" and "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." There were critics ready to point out that these high principles did not square with slavery, indentured servitude, and political disfranchisement, but they did not prevail. In the fervour of the moment, Jefferson, while bent on justifying the revolt against George III, in fact challenged the rule of property which was guaranteed by the state constitutions drafted by his fellow revolutionists in that very epoch. Even Jeffersonians, when confronted like Rousseau's followers, with the logical consequences

of their doctrine shrank from applying it. Nevertheless the grand words stood for all time, and advocates of manhood suffrage and woman suffrage afterward appealed to them with great effect in attacking property and sex qualifications on the right to vote.

When once the free-and-equal doctrine had been let loose in the New World and the Old, it was impossible to check its course. Steadily it made headway against governments founded upon a class basis. Steadily it supplanted the old philosophy of politics which gave to property and to estates a place in the process of government. Within seventy years after the Declaration of Independence the battle for white manhood suffrage was virtually won in the United States. Some remnants of the old system of class privilege in politics remained, but they were regarded as anachronisms. Time was to dispose of them. America was committed to the great doctrine that in politics all heads are equal and all are entitled to the same share of power in the government.

In Europe also political equalitarianism has done deadly work in the old order. In England it has not been carried to the same degree as in the United States, but the Lords' Veto Act, levelling down the power of the ancient and honourable Chamber of Peers, is an echo of it, full of significance for the future. In Sweden, in 1866, the four-class system was swept away in favour of a general suffrage. Austria abandoned group representation in 1907. The third French Republic abolished the Chamber of Peers and substituted a Senate, now chosen by indirect election. At this moment China is in the throes of a Revolution due to the struggle between those who would establish a stable government on the foundations of effective economic and military interests, and those fired with a passion for "the rights of man."

The logical application of Rousseau's doctrine of complete and abstract human equality is clear. It means that the number of members in any legislature shall be apportioned among geographical districts approximately according to the number of inhabitants without reference to their wealth, occupations, or interests. It means that all high public officers shall be elected by majorities or pluralities. Man is to be regarded as a "political" animal. No account is to be taken of those sentiments and views which, as Madison says, arise from the possession of different degrees and kinds of property. All heads are equal and, from the point of view of politics, alike. The statesman is a mathematician concerned with counting heads. The rule of numbers is enthroned. The homage once paid to kings is to be paid to the statistics of election returns. Surely, in all the history of thought, there is nothing more wonderful than this.

While this political revolution has been going on, have the economic groups once recognized by statesmen and political philosophers disappeared? The answer is emphatic. It is to be found in the census returns, which, as certainly as the doomsday book of William the Conqueror, record the perdurance of group and class interests despite the rhetoric of political equality. It is to be found in practical politics day by day. Does any one think that a thousand farmers or laborers, going on about their tasks, have the same influence in the formation of a protective tariff bill as a thousand manufacturers represented by spokesmen in the lobbies and committee rooms of the Congress of the United States? Does any one suppose that the exemption of trade unions from the provisions of the Sherman Anti-Trust Law was the result of the platonic wishes of "the people," rather than the determined and persistent activity of the American Federation of Labor?

We are therefore confronted by an inherent antagonism between our generally accepted political doctrines, and the actual facts of political life. In the world of natural science men do not tarry long

(Continued on page 7)