

Political Representation

All true political representation must be, and can only be based on definite economic interests.—(Marx).

CIRCUMSTANCES (camp conditions principally) operate against my desire to reply to my critics and at the same time push on to more considerations of ways and means of social change. In this pass I propose to resort to wholesale quotations of matter needful to support the positions I assume in regard to working class political strategy, Socialist and Labor. It is the immediate future I have in mind in reasoning on this strategy, particularly in Canada and the United States. Farmer-Labor parties, politically representative of the chief producing elements of those national communities, have been formed in certain localities, while in others such coalitions are either agitated for or else close affiliations of existing farmer and labor political parties are advocated. The desire in these proposals is for a larger mass of co-ordinated radical elements in the struggle against the more powerful business interests who exercise preponderating controls as to the formation of public opinion and over state policies in both home and foreign affairs. Chiefly, the basis of unity of the economic groups is claimed on the ground of common interests as against the exploiting business elements; and on the possession of a common psychology as producers, having concepts of the superior functional worth to society of the producer and his rights as such.

Many socialists disagree with the attempt to foster or form these hyphenated Farmer-Labor parties on the ground that farmers are employers of wage laborers and that therefore there inevitably arises a conflict of interest between the two classes which is bound to have its political reflex. On the whole I see the matter in the same light though I am inclined to have some greater regard than some of them for the integrating power of the interests and mental traits held by the groups in common. Though the proposal for the amalgamation of Farmer-Labor groups in one political party may have its virtue, I can not see that it would have any chances of permanency. This, partly because of the conflict of interest alluded to as wage workers and employers, and partly—perhaps mainly—because the groups are of different occupational interest to a great degree. The problems of the farming class in the future will have to be dealt with by themselves with a minimum of interference from those who have no first hand acquaintance with the facts of agricultural technology and economics. Better each group have its own party so that conflict of interest between the groups may be fought out without impairing organization, while there is nothing to prevent them acting together spontaneously or by arrangement when common interest prompts them so to do. Such promptings, we may predict, will become more frequent with the spread of socialist ideals and as needs dictate. My belief is that there is a period of development in political formation along the lines of economic group representation on the North American continent, tending to take some such shape as follows: a political party of the bourgeois interest, a party of the agricultural interest, and a party of the wage-working interest, the two latter parties making up the progressive left and becoming, in course of time more and more impregnated with socialist ideals.

Here then I propose a discussion for two issues of the Clarion, dealing with the inherited system of political representation whose seeming breakdown, due to the deflection of Farmers and wageworkers from the old-line parties to parties of their own interest, is the occasion for my prediction of a development of political representation by economic groups. Other issues will contain a review of the structure and working of a group system once obtaining in Medieval times. I elect Professor Charles A. Beard, historian of high reputation. I lift Beard from the pages of his "Economic Basis of Politics," a series of four lectures given at Amherst College, U.S., in 1916, the last lecture revised in the light of

later political experience, the whole published in book form in 1923 by Alfred A. Knopf, New York:—

The Doctrine of Political Equality.

THE great political philosophers, with few exceptions, have regarded property as the fundamental element in political power, and have looked upon a constitution as a balance of economic groups. The governments founded and developed before the nineteenth century were in fact complexes of group interests. Nowhere was the representative system, in its origin, designed to reflect the opinions of mere numerical aggregations of human beings considered in the abstract apart from property and employment. On the contrary, it reflected the sentiments and views of different sorts and conditions of men, estates or orders: clergy, nobility, burghers, and peasants.

In the United States where there was no clerical estate or established nobility to be represented in the government, the existence of the two fundamental property groups—the owners of realty and the owners of personality—was taken into account in positive constitutional law or in the check and balance system provided by the separation of powers. If the first American constitutions were more democratic than those of Europe, the fact is not to be attributed to radical changes in human nature, induced by a voyage across the Atlantic, but, as the great Webster pointed out, to a very wide distribution of property, due mainly to cheap land.

So things stood in the closing years of the old regime. They suddenly came two great revolutions, one in economic fact, and the other in political theory. The first was brought about by the invention of the steam engine and machinery, creating an immense amount of property which had hitherto existed only as a minor element in economic life, namely, industrial and mercantile capital. So rapidly did this new form of property accumulate that even in the United States, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it exceeded in value the agricultural land of the country.

Being more mobile and more easily concentrated than land, a vast portion of it quickly fell into the hands of, relatively speaking, a small portion of society. As land was the great stabilizer of the old order, so capital became the great disturber in the new order. Like a mighty giant tossing to and fro in a fever, in its quest for profits, it tore masses of men from the land, from their sleepy villages and hamlets, and hurled them here and there all over the globe. Under its influence the old sharp class differences were disarranged. The peasant might become a successful cotton spinner, a financial magnate, a contributor to party war-chests, a peer of the realm. The Manchester individualists, Cobden and Bright, looking upon the new order which they had helped to create, pronounced it good and declared that because any hustling individual might rise from poverty to wealth, the era of individual equality had arrived. Instead of studying the new groups, the new class divisions, more subtle and complex than ever before, they proclaimed the glad day of equality.

While James Watt was experimenting in Glasgow with the steam engine, and thus preparing to blow up the old economic order in the realm of fact, a French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, was experimenting with ideas scarcely less dangerous to the ancient regime than the operations of the Scotch mechanic. Unlike his distinguished predecessor in political science, Montesquieu, Rousseau did not search assiduously among the institutions and habits of mankind to find a basis for his political philosophy. Rousseau was not a man of science or a detached scholar. He was a passionate propagandist. He formulated the sentiments and views of the third estate in France then beginning to thunder against the monarchy, which was buttressed by the special privileges of the clergy and the nobility. In his Social Contract he set forth the moral and philoso-

phic justification for the revolt of the third estate.

In his system of political thought, Rousseau, in effect, advanced several negative propositions. He denied that there was any inherent and essential connection between economics and politics. He repudiated the idea that the nature and amount of men's material possessions and the character of their occupations could have any substantial influence on their political sentiments and their political actions. He rejected the age long view that the transmission, alienation, accumulation, and distribution of wealth bore a fundamental relation to the form and practices of the government. He denied the doctrine that society is a complex of more or less conscious groups and interests. For the group or class-man he substituted the abstract, the cosmopolitan, the universal man.

In order that we may get the essence of this new political philosophy, let us make a somewhat close examination of the doctrines laid down by Rousseau. He simply cannot be ignored, for his Social Contract became the text book of the French Revolution and of that world-wide equalization movement which has in our day penetrated even the heart of China, preparing the way for the overthrow of absolutism and the triumph of the third estate.

The origin of the state Rousseau finds not in a divine command that one should rule over others, or in the fusion of estates, but in a voluntary union of free men. Of course Rousseau knows that this was not true, in point of fact, and respect for the truth compels him to admit it. But he cannot allow the matter of historicity to interfere with the foundations of his system of political ethics.

In Book I of his Social Contract, he says: "If, then, we remove from the social contract all that is not of its essence, it will be reduced to the following terms: Each of us gives in common his person and all his force under the supreme direction of the general will; and we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole."

"Immediately, this act of association produces, instead of the individual person of each contracting party, a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly has votes, which receives from the same act its utility,—its common being, its life and its will. This public personage, thus formed by the union of all the others, formerly took the name of city, and now takes that of republic or body politic. This is called the state by its members when it is passive; the sovereign when it is active; and a power when comparing it to its equals. With regard to the associates, they take collectively the name people, and call themselves individually citizens, as participating in the sovereign authority, and subjects, as submitted to the laws of the state. But these terms are often confounded and are taken one for the other. It is enough to know how to distinguish them when they are employed with all precision."

Having found the origin of society in a general agreement of free and equal men, Rousseau naturally places sovereign power by moral right in "the people"—a collectivity of all the individual members of the state. The law of the state is therefore not the will of some class (like the landed gentry) imposed upon all others, or a compromise rule produced by a balance of conflicting group interests, but is, according to Rousseau, an expression of "the general will." This alone is its justification. If it destroys the rights and property of the individual still he must abide by it. "In order then that the social contract may not be an idle formula, it includes tacitly this engagement, which alone can give force to the others, that whoever shall refuse to obey the general will, shall be compelled to it by the whole body. This signifies nothing if not that he will be forced to be free; for it is this condition which, giving each citizen to the country, guarantees him from all personal dependence—a condition which forms the device and working of the political

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