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THE DEFECTIVE TERMINOLOGY OF POLITICAL ECONOMY.

ANY one who has devoted close attention to the question or cluster of questions popularly styled the Labour Problem must have realized that one of the greatest difficulties in the way of intelligent discussion—to say nothing of arriving at a solution—is the extremely defective terminology of political economy. We have no words in the English language to express many of the ideas generated by the later phases of the industrial agitation. The growth of language has not kept pace with the progress of social evolution. Old phrases and formulas, originated at a time when conditions were wholly diverse from those of to-day, when applied to existing systems are apt to be misleading to honest inquirers, and to afford the disingenuous controversialist an opportunity to advance a quibble in place of an argument. It is surely in the interest, not of the Labour Reformer especially, but of all who desire clearness of thought and exact definitions, that so serious an impediment to a right understanding of this vital question should be supplied.

There is no more glaring instance of widespread popular misconception resulting from the unscientific want of precision in the use of language than the notion largely entertained as to the nature and scope of the labour agitation. It is often loosely described as a struggle between "Capital and Labour." Neither of these terms appropriately characterizes the opposing forces, and their use has given rise to innumerable volumes of elaborate misinformation and discussion which are wholly wide of the mark. What is "capital" in the correct and original signification of the word? The surplus wealth created by labour and used for the production of more wealth. But by a figure of speech the word has come to be employed as meaning the persons who control capital—the interests, powers, and privileges of the class having the means of employing others. In the current discussions of the industrial question it is sometimes used in one sense and sometimes in the other within the compass, it may be, of a single sentence. From the truism that labour cannot possibly have any quarrel with the inert material necessary to production, the false conclusion is frequently deduced or implied that its complaints against the powerful—and therefore at times aggressive—interests comprehended under the same term are unfounded. It is no wonder that much confusion of thought has resulted.

The term "labour" is equally vague and inexact as customarily used. In place of work of any kind it has acquired by popular usage a restricted significance. Most writers employ it in this limited sense as applying only to certain kinds of labour paid by wages. This definition excludes the large classes of farmers, brain-workers, and mercantile employees, who, though many of them may not recognize it, have an equal interest in the right adjustment of industrial grievances with the artisan and unskilled labourer. The narrow and altogether false view of the labour problem which regards it as merely a contest over wages and hours between the manual labourer and his immediate employer, instead of a struggle for the amelioration of conditions which press hardly on the masses of the people

in the capacity as consumers as well as producers, has been fostered, if not originated, by the misapplication of the words "capital" and "labour," owing to the absence of more explicit definitions.

The much over-worked term "monopolist" has been diverted from its rightful meaning to fill an obvious gap in the vocabulary. Implying at first special privileges granted to a single person by the Government, it is made to do duty not only to express the powers and advantages specially awarded to numerous individuals but those obtained by large classes under the ordinary working of business competition and the law of supply and demand. Labour Reformers are often accused of perverting language by stigmatizing as "monopolists" not alone the Goulds and Vanderbilts, whose position is secured by public charter, but capitalists of the stamp of Stewart, the New York merchant prince, and Armour, the Chicago pork packer. The only answer which can be made to such an accusation is that there is no other English word which even approximately embodies the idea sought to be conveyed.

At the very foundation of a clear comprehension of the Labour Question lies a due appreciation of the immense change in social conditions wrought by improved machinery, steam, and telegraphic communication, and the wonderful expansion of industry and commerce. It is the veriest platitude to enlarge upon the much greater stress of competition and the vast accumulation and concentration of wealth under the new conditions. Yet there is no word or phrase which sums up the situation and can be applied to distinguish the industrial conditions of the present from those of half a century ago.

Many other instances in point might be given. Enough has been said, however, to give some idea of the defects in the terminology of economic science. That this want has been realized is shown by the borrowing from the French of such words as "bourgeois," "proletariat," and "exploitation," for which there are no English equivalents. The want of clear and well-defined terms to embody the new conceptions arising out of the later phases of the industrial struggle compels the writer either to employ language in a misleading and often contradictory fashion, or to resort to lengthy definitions and explanations as to the precise meaning he wishes his expressions to bear. Awkward periphrasis must be substituted for the single clear-cut phrase if it is desired to escape misconstruction. Before political economy can be re-written in accordance with the vast change which has come over civilized society by the revolutionizing of industrial and commercial methods, the vocabulary of the science must be largely extended and its terminology reconstructed.

PHILLIPS THOMPSON.

PROHIBITION AND LICENSE.

THE gentlemen who took part in the recent Provincial Conference were so busily engaged in considering and proposing useless or mischievous amendments to the British North America Act as to quite overlook certain other amendments, which are really and even urgently called for. If, for instance, instead of urging the abolition of Disallowance, or making other suggestions equally objectionable, they had proposed such an amendment to our Constitution as would make clear the respective rights of the Federal Parliament and the Provincial Legislatures with regard to the regulation and restriction of the liquor traffic, they would have made far better use of their time.

Such an amendment is very greatly needed. Both the Dominion and Provincial Parliaments assume the right to pass laws, the object and effect of which are to restrict and regulate the trade in intoxicating liquors. Some of these laws, it is said, the Dominion Parliament has alone power to pass, while others are said to be entirely within provincial jurisdiction. Now such a division of power should, it is plain, (1) be based on some reasonable principle, and (2) be clearly defined. But, as a matter of fact, it depends upon no principle whatever, it is a purely arbitrary division; and the dividing line instead of being clear and well defined is to the last degree obscure.

In what manner then is this power divided? The Dominion Parliament, it is said, has the exclusive power of regulating the sale of liquor by what are called "prohibition acts," while to the Provincial Legislatures is ascribed the exclusive right of regulating the liquor trade by what are called "license acts." These distinctions, it is claimed, have been sanctioned by the Privy Council, in the judgments which declare the Scott Act to be constitutional, as being a prohibition act, and the McCarthy Act to be unconstitutional, as being a license act. Assuming the correctness of these judgments, and assuming that the one measure is a fair type of the