

The Politics of the Working-Class

Editors Note: The following article is a report of a speech delivered by Comrade J. Harrington in Victoria, B. C. Victoria forms, partly, the south end of Nanaimo riding in the Federal elections. Comrade W. A. Pritchard is our candidate in this constituency.

NOT a few people are given over to the obsession that Parliament as it stands today is a popular institution. They entertain the idea that it is elected by popular "will," that its purpose is to safeguard their interests and desires, and that by the election of "good" men, i.e., men who have high ideals of public service and human welfare—the various conflicting elements and evils in society can be reconciled and abrogated.

This concept of parliament is continually emphasized by the idealist philosophy and education of the time, and the various candidates of the old parties, imbued with the same notions, play on this theme of "good government," point out each other's disqualifications, and forever harp upon what is done that should not be done, or, conversely, on what ought not to be but is. That is all there is to political campaigning. That, and a silver tongue to give it utterance.

But while that is all there is to campaigning, there is something more to government: Parliament never was an expression of the interests of the common people, that is, of the producing class. In early medieval times every village had its "moot," i.e., its common assembly, delegated from and by the village community for the regulation of its various duties, e.g., for the allotting of land to cultivate; the times of ploughing, sowing and reaping, etc., all the—to us—complex, irksome customs coincident to medieval life. In all matters pertaining to daily life the village moot was, in reality, the expression of common interest.

Gradually, the village fell under the sway of the feudal system, the relation of lordship and serfdom and the consequent regulation of village conduct to the primary interest of the feudal overlord. Concurrent with this evolution was the evolution of the merchant class. Discoveries of new minerals, countries and peoples, evolved markets, and markets meant trade. Towns came into existence, towns whose modes and necessities of life clashed with feudal economy.

Nevertheless, the social forces of development fostered and favored the growth of the merchant class as against the feudal lord. Towns continued to grow, manufactures increased, and with them the power of the traders. The conflict of those traders with their feudal overlords, combined with a variety of other matters, broke the peace of the realm and brought the interference of monarchy. The king invited the leading traders to his residence, ostensibly to discuss their grievances, but in reality as hostages for the good conduct of their respective towns. But they had an opportunity to air their grievances; their conditions were probed; they secured charters and concessions and obtained relief from the growing exactions of needy overlords.

Such were the conditions of the real beginning of parliament. Continually, the merchant and manufacturer gathered power, continually they extended their dominion and increased their privileges and prerogatives. They ousted the landlord from dominance. They established centralized authority; they symbolized that authority in absolute monarchy and finally made and unmade things as their commercial interests demanded. From 1688 until today the story of parliamentary development is but a record of commercial development, a record of a national assembly of traders legislating in accordance with their ever widening interests, styling themselves the voice of the people and dominating all social activity.

The growth of business and the concentration of capital has now developed its inevitable antagonisms between the members of the capitalist class themselves. The same economic laws by and through which they expropriate the common people from the

means of life are now reacting on themselves, reducing their members to the ranks of the proletariat and centering governmental authority in the cabinet—the central citadel of the financial oligarchy. Thus parliament was, and is, the expression of commercial rights and business interests, and never was and never shall be the protector and exponent of the exploited wealth producers—the great toiling, sweating and industrious commonality.

It is obvious that to follow parliamentary tactics and parties, is of no moment to the working class. Neither Liberal, Conservative, Progressive, nor Independent—the latter two being but modifications of the former—can ever solve our problem. Our issue—the issue of the working class—is not the Tariff. Nor it is free trade, nor the development of resources, nor more work, nor unemployment, nor any of the other catch cries of elections. The one issue before us is economic freedom, i.e., freedom of access to the means whereby we live. And that freedom must be achieved by the working class, must be brought about by their understanding of the relationships obtaining in human society. No government can, or will, bring it to pass. Because their interest is our exploitation. That is the fundamental antagonism.

Modern society is organized on capitalist property rights. That is, the right to hold as private property, for private advantage, the social means of life; the processes of production necessary to the whole society. The ownership of the productive plant, therefore, gives the owners power to dictate the terms of labor—and it gives them the titular right to all the products of that production. Industry is operated only, therefore, when it is to the advantage of the possessing class. And it is to its advantage only when a profit can be derived from the process. That profit is only obtainable when the goods are sold in the world market. If they cannot be sold, industry closes down, and the working class stagnates and rots in idleness. That is the cause of unemployment.

Why is there a surplus of goods to sell? Because, by the introduction of machinery and the elimination of unnecessary labor, the working class is able to produce a far greater mass value of commodities than the value of their labor-power, which produced them. The working class receives for its labor-power, the market price of the reproduction of that labor-power, i.e., the amount required to maintain the social standard of life of the working class. Three results follow: (1) As the value of production exceeds the value of the labor-power that produces it, the working class cannot purchase the commodities they have created. Consequently the market is glutted and production stops. With what consequences we know; (2) As wages are determined competitively in the world market, the life condition of the workers steadily becomes worse; (3) with increased production there is increased unemployment. The sole cause of all three is the wages system.

As the cessation of wages is caused by the cessation of industry, and that industry, in time, by the failure of the capitalist market, the only remedy is the abolition of the capitalist system of society. No reform whatsoever can accomplish any alleviation—permanently. Capital is the relationship existing between the owners of industry who do not produce, and the workers in industry, who own nothing but produce everything. Wages, is, therefore, the complement of capital. Without the one, the other cannot exist. Wages is bounded by profits, and profits by markets, and the key to the whole position is capitalist ownership. And the substitution of the collective social ownership and the operation of industry for the full use of society is the one and only means to social peace.

To abolish capital implies political effort. For, since business maintains and dominates governments, governments must protect business. The power of capital in property right is therefore to

capture the state. The state is like the bridge of a modern liner. It is the executive from which issues all authority and action, and whoever commands there commands everything.

But to make the State the servant of our will is to awaken the slave to the perception of his master. All revolutions take place in the brain—first. Not that the mind devises the revolution, but that the determining conditions present the issue clearly and unmistakably. In previous revolutions the determining components of change were comparatively simple—though fundamentally identical—but the material of directive possibility was far less than now. Those new developed agencies are the weapons of the workers to ease the birth pangs of the new social commonwealth. Our eyes are neither on the future nor the past. Our attention and efforts are wholly on the present. The past is our compass through the uncharted present; our goal is economic freedom.

POPULARITY.

IN the task of educating the workers to an understanding of their true position in society, the writers and speakers of the Socialist movement are open to many and various forms of criticism. The cry is often heard that the movement would be more popular, and the workers would be far more receptive to the truths of Scientific Socialism if the style and language employed in the presentation of the revolutionary position was of a less academic character.

This criticism usually comes from those superficial minds to whom a noisy enthusiasm and a big party membership is of paramount importance. While it cannot be denied that some propagandists are inclined to a somewhat profuse application of ponderous phrases, their desire to be definite and correct is worthy of every consideration. The reason for the ignorance of the working class to their real interests is to be found in their lack of a social perspective, loose, unscientific habits of reasoning, and a vocabularily limited to a few common words. They have been trained only to be slaves in thought and deed. Hence it is that the habit of investigation, unbiased and independent, so important and requisite to the Socialist movement, is difficult to acquire. Inability for the mental effort towards grasping the significance of the phraseology of Scientific Socialism is largely the reason for the Socialist movement being unpopular and misunderstood.

To gain popularity and enthusiasm among the masses, is not a difficult thing to accomplish, as history abundantly proves. The indulgence in sentimental writing and oratory, the teaching of popular slogans easy to repeat without fear of mental strain is, without doubt, a successful method of appealing to the workers in the interests of opportunism and the building up of a big movement. Literature, supposed to be revolutionary, cartooning that arch fiend Capital, small of form, brutally visaged, with the sign of the dollar on his top hat, dancing with devilish glee upon the prostrate form of Labor, the Colossus, garbed in overalls and square paper cap,—this as a form of propaganda is most alluring, but of little effect in clearing away the illusions common to the working-class mind. The seeking of popularity is foolish and dangerous, as many fallen idols know to their sorrow.

The work of explaining the facts of social life in correct language will never be popular, except with the earnest student. As scientific knowledge is valued in industrial and commercial life, so must it be valued by man in his social affairs. Its application by a dependent working class will bring independence and harmony out of the present social confusion. May that day come soon.

S. E.