

# WESTERN CLARION

A Journal of  
CURRENT  
EVENTS

Official Organ of  
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

HISTORY  
ECONOMICS  
PHILOSOPHY

No. 923

TWENTIETH YEAR

Twice a Month

VANCOUVER, B.C., SEPTEMBER 16, 1924

FIVE CENTS

## The Straight Issue

THE unsettlement of peace has affected the S. P. of C. as largely as society in general. Indeed, if one may judge from recent utterances in the Clarion, if the S. P. of C. is not already defunct it has an ominous rattle in the throat. Between constitutional conciliation; waiting for something to turn up; and its "be kind to auld grannie" attitude to labor, it has surely adopted a new Joseph's coat philosophy. Com. "C." Com. Harrington, even ye editor, all vigorously ring the changes of the wider vision (and incidentally we may toll our beads in gratitude, for Marx, on whose good broad shoulders we can foist our pet predilections.)

And what is this wider vision? Apparently, that between labor and socialism there ought, or need, to be, no antagonism (H); that our attitude to labor politically should be sympathetic, as it is economically (C); and that, seemingly, the mechanics of the socialist philosophy may be resilient to conciliative introspection (MacLeod). Well, another little ripple on the flowing waters can make no difference.

The real question of issue is tactics. As the nature of tactics is to be determined by the nature of the proposition, we must look at the proposition—Socialism. What is Socialism? The theory, that as the means and resource of human life are socially operated and socially necessary, they should be socially owned and administered in the interest of the whole society. The premise is not in question. Why are those means not socially owned? Because the current system, capital, signifies the ownership and control of those means of life, by and for the exclusive interests of the capitalist class. The aim of Socialism is, therefore, the transference of property right in the means of life, from a single class, to society. How is this transference to be effected? There we touch the crucial question. And its answer is to be found, not merely in the phenomenal antagonisms of effect, but in the basic fundamental of its harmonies as well.

Capital had its inception as a social protest against the obsolete restrictions of Feudalism. It took form and ideation from and amidst the conflict of developing commerce with the established aristocracy of land. It strove incessantly, in war and turmoil, against the tyranny of ancient class rule; but it was not that struggle that gave it victory. It developed the intellectual reflex of its ambitions, yet not for that was its triumph. It achieved itself because, in harmony with the developing forces of mercantile conditions, it served, vitalised and regenerated the physical, mental and moral needs of a society swathed in the bondage and servility of the fact and urged imperiously forward by the vibrant impulse of new cognitions. It did not accomplish itself by way of constitutional reform. On the contrary, it swept away the restricting laws, regulations and usages of ancient privilege; and the more completely it surveyed the field of objective the more drastic was the sweep of its activity. Under the watchwords of freedom of thought and freedom of movement it fought for its own privilege, drawing its unity of purpose from the insufferable misery of common life. And it sought and won the sympathies and suffrages of society at large, not merely because its development was consonant with the development of the social forces, but, as well, because it was the vehicle of expression of the new orientation of social operations, born from, and burning with the vivid reality of social relation.

But, while it served the interests of society in general, temporarily, fundamentally, it served the interest of a new class rule. In establishing the new freedom it also established the regnancy of its own dominion. It maintained its new law with the aspirations of society. It clothed its new institutions with the idealism of class abstractions. In its development, it built up the new property forms of "right," "justice," "freedom," "humanity," "civilisation," into its own tradition of "eternal truth." But because eternal truth violates the reality of eternal movement, because property right is fundamentally anti-social, the new progress inevitably developed new forms of conflict. The mobility of the market contradicted the mobility of labor; for the free market is the symbol of exploitation, while free labor is the satisfaction of the means of life. The former is a straight issue of capitalist class rule. The latter, transformed by social misunderstanding, into its Capitalist corollary—the travesty of contract.

Thus Capitalist society, apparently beginning as a single class with a common aim, necessarily unfolded its ever growing bitterness of class divisions. It graded and subdivided. It split into group and faction. It subdivided and antagonized. It confused the issue, and veiled the cause of the conflict. Not designedly or by collusion; but because of the tradition of freedom; that forced group, faction and division into the closed orbit of capitalist ambition, and motivated with the idealist phantasies of capitalist ideation. And as the venue of political activities widened and changed under the widening stress of trade issues, the fundamental economic of the ruling class was forced more insistently, more completely into the forefront of living life. And this constant march of life and its reality, on theory and its visionism, brought into ever increasing prominence the hurried shifts and double edged expedients of class reform. For this exploitation of the living by the dead, of need by law, demands and implies the continual redecoration of reality.

If static society is to continue in existence, if capitalist civilisation is to endure, the rude clash of interest must be softened. The struggle of section with section for the necessities of their ambitions must be alleviated; the struggle of labor for bread mitigated: the quest of man for satisfaction, modified. In the modification of these things, the force and form of the modifying influence must draw its sustenance from the energy of pulsing condition. Interest must choose and conciliate in the subservience of interest; power gloss the secret of power in the contentment of exploitation; need correlate with need in the violence of progress. And to do this they must use the forces at hand—the interactions of interest itself. Positive interest joins with its kind for a common objective. Negative interest—minor in power—is thrust aside or absorbed. Dominance sacrifices its rival—and sometimes its rivalry—for the perpetuation of privileges. While exploited subjection responds, almost mechanically, to the compelling immediacy of need. Each and all, moved by primal interest, react to its impulse. They sow as they see; they struggle as they must; they devise as they can; they bind or they loosen as circumstances decree; but they triumph only as circumstances fold her shimmering veil from the cold brow of reality.

Who inaugurated the reform era: Russell and Grey, or capitalist expansion? Who widened the

franchise, passed factory acts, repealed the corn laws—the Chartist, the Shaftesburys and Peels, or the opposing rivalries of property interests? Who made free trade, Cobden or the growth of industry? Who abrogated slavery in Britain, Wilberforce or progressive economy in production? Who abolished it in America, Lincoln or capitalist competition? What turned the liberal Gladstone of the 40s into the Imperialist of the 80s? Who determined the Russian revolution, Lenin or Czarist feudalism? Who won the war, the U.S. (?) or the exhaustion of the central powers? Who dictated the Peace Treaty, Wilson or imperialism? Is it not the same with labor organizations? What motives the S. P. C. and its vagaries? Or the A. F. L.? Or international affiliation? Or the One B. U.? Or syndicalist side stepping?—Initiative, or the blind pressure of conditions? Sympathetic reflexes, or the reflexes of an unenlightened proletariat?

True, men play their part in all those issues. But not the determining part. According as they saw the situation they struggled and influenced. And the clarity of their seeing was determined by the fecundity of their conditioning. They were the product of their times: the tools of their chances. And their power, and influence, and concordance lay not in that they were supermen or supertools, but that as they found themselves caught in the tangled tides of events they reacted to the philosophy of events as status, and class, and interest touched the chords of sympathy or aversion. And according to the extent and degree that the emotions of society were awakened, i.e., as society visualised the condition, they, as spokesmen of particular ideals, could reach out to the crowd and draw it, in virtue of its own comprehension, or, were repelled by the deadness of its unimaginative inertia.

Certainly, men, parties and issues, change,—even as the spring flowers, the abiding state, the eternal hills. Yet not by determinate volitions, but only as their conceptual incidence is proven by time, or annulled by progress. The thing that they were, the thought that they dreamed is true, or it is false. Not only relative to time, but relative to reality. That is, it satisfies not merely the exigencies of the hour, but also correlates with the essentials of being. Consequently, if false, it leaves but a memory, sepulchred in the dust of pitying eyes. If true, it stands related through all the ages. Hence it comes that the few "invariably right," that can give a reason stand, conscious and decisive in the dual relation of time and reality; while the "million who can never be wrong" maintain their cohesion by molar might only in the foaming phases of time. Who was right, Roger Bacon or medieval scholasticism? Columbus, or the mass that jeered at his witlessness? Copernicus, or the quantity that saw not his kingdom? Bruno, or the dogma that destroyed him? Darwin, or the world that derided? Marx, or the inertia of "freedom"? Lenin, or the bulk that determined his activity? Liebknecht, or the number that over-matched him? And last, but none the least to us, socialism, or the exigence of protagonism?

Conversely, what determines the right of a matter!—its exponent, or the logic of development? What decides the acceptance, its truth or the majesty of events? What sanctions the social validity, its advocacy, or its necessity? What vitalises it with the blood of life, its human appeal, or time

(Continued on page 8)