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WESTERN CLARION

A Journal of
CURRENT
EVENTS

Official Organ of
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
PHILOSOPHY

Number 831 Twice a Month

VANCOUVER, B. C., NOVEMBER 16, 1920.

FIVE CENTS

On Copying the Bolsheviki

At the time of the 1917 revolution in Russia we approved of the action of the Bolshevik leaders. During the many vicissitudes of fortune that have taken place since, we have seen no reason to alter this position. We understood, as we still understand, that Bolshevism is not Socialism. Our knowledge of Russian conditions, though perhaps meagre, was sufficient to acquaint us with the fact that this country was not yet ready for Socialism. Economic and social development had not reached that stage where social ownership of the means of production was possible.

But, what was accomplished in Russia should merit the approval of all members of the revolutionary working class. A great change has taken place. A militant, Marxian minority took occasion by the hand and established proletarian dictatorship. Were the conditions not favorable for such action this dictatorship could scarcely have weathered the storms of the past three years. That the Bolsheviks have succeeded, not alone in holding the reins of power but, in materially strengthening their position should, in itself, be proof sufficient that conditions warranted the effort.

The old feudal aristocracy held control of political power longer than elsewhere in Europe. The natural conditions of the country made possible such a state of affairs. But the time came when the rising bourgeoisie was economically important enough to demand political rights. Such demands were successively combatted by the ruling class. At the time when the opportunity for bourgeois success arrived, a great war was in progress. The manufacturing section seized control. They were poorly organized and in no condition to make secure their control. Were the old landed aristocrats all they had to contend with, no doubt their efforts would have been crowned with success. But such was not the case.

A resourceful Socialist minority had been at work for some years. Among the industrial proletariat an extensive educational policy had been carried out. The works of Marx, Engels, and other Socialist teachers were disseminated and studied. The weakness of the revisionist, and reformist elements of Germany, France and England was fully understood long before the Revolution. They were Socialists of the Marxian school. Their object was the abolition of class society, and not the advocacy of palliatives and nostrums.

A weak ruling class, lacking the means of repression found in highly organized capitalist centres; a peasantry uneducated and consequently devoid of that respect for master class teaching inseparable from well developed industrial communities; a state of war in existence, which spelled starvation, bloodshed, and discontent for the masses; all these circumstances made possible the successful attempt of the Bolsheviki to capture political power. This they did.

Just what procedure our self-classified, Simon-pure intellectuals would have followed in such a contingency we are not aware. In all likelihood they would have chosen to remain in wage slavery until they were absolutely certain that a majority were in favor of the change. Once they were able to quote a passage from each of the Socialist classics to prove that the time was ripe, perhaps they would give the proposition their earnest consideration.

To those who are in the proletariat, yet not of it, who secure a livelihood by less arduous toil than

the masses who slave in mills, mines, and factories, this policy of "watchful waiting" may well suffice. The system does not yet bear heavily enough on their shoulders to cause an effort for relief. Capitalism still has attractions that prevent their participation in any venture that is not certain of success. "Show us that the attempt will involve no sacrifice on our part, as well as a quotation from Marx sanctioning the step, and we may try it. Anything less than this is anathema to us. Away with it."

To the scientific Socialist, the works of Marx and Engels are valued on account of the knowledge they impart. The principles of the Socialist philosophy—the Materialist Conception of History, the Class Struggle, and the theory of Surplus Value—have been first expressed by these great teachers. Their contribution to social science has been invaluable. Their analysis of capitalist society has been clear, thorough, and accurate. We prize them for what they have accomplished. No one else has done so well in this field.

But there is considerable difference between being Marxian students and Marxian worshippers. The one implies a critical study, and the other blind faith. They are two distinct modes of approach.

The analysis of capitalist production made by Marx and Engels, over seventy years ago, still holds good. The same social system prevails. But many changes have taken place in the development of this system. The old form of trades unionism, of which Marx has written, is rapidly making way for industrial unionism, which better enables the sellers of labor power to resist the encroachments of capital. Were Marx reviewing the situation today he would doubtless take the same attitude towards the new form that he did to the old. Yet we find some of his followers who still adhere to the craft union idea, and oppose industrial unionism because Marx did not mention it.

Such a situation as that of the British coal miners strike would be utterly unthinkable in Marx's day. Not only because they are a party to a "triple alliance" of other trades, but because of the new methods resorted to by the ruling class. Armored tanks, automobiles, aeroplanes, etc., were all unknown fifty years ago, and today they are regarded as the most efficient methods of coercing workers, and making possible the transportation of commodities while the mines are closed.

With new developments in the machinery of production it necessarily follows that tactical changes are made imperative. In a general sense the tactics of the Socialist movement are contained in the works of Marx and Engels. But methods of attack are not absolute or rigid. They are not set to the system, regardless of time or place, as "perfect music unto noble words." Even if we take the term "dictatorship of the proletariat"—it was not spoken of by Marx till he had seen the effects of the Paris Commune. It matters not, for the sake of illustration, whether we accept the term in the Kautskian or Leninian sense. The point is that Marx did not employ it in his earlier writings, and found occasion to do so only when a new situation had arrived.

So with us of today. We must mould our tactics in accordance with the conditions at hand. This the Bolsheviki did. They took control at the opportune moment. They did not stop to enquire what sages and seers had prescribed. Whether or not

their action will lead to Socialism, by the safest and shortest route, time alone will tell. The question cannot be settled by quotations from Marx.

That the methods pursued in Russia are not adaptable everywhere else we know full well. In fact, perhaps in that one country alone such tactics suffice. The circumstances of the case will determine what must be done. Too many enthusiasts rush to the conclusion that "What's good enough in Russia is good enough here." They fail to understand the situation. In this connexion it might be correct to state that while the Revolution was a good thing for the Russian workers, as many impartial persons and delegations have testified, it has had a detrimental effect, in many ways, on the working class movement in other countries.

That optimism, and impulsiveness, that is sure to follow in the aftermath of victory is likely to retard a philosophical study of human society. Instead of explaining theories and laws of value and surplus value, and probing into the economic base to reveal the nature of the political and social structure, there is now a tendency to get busy and do something. Many of our students develop into master strategists and tacticians. They not only understand every move the Bolsheviki made, and the reasons for making them, but persist in laying out plans of action, and carving the political framework of the structure that must be built. In short they have Bolsheviki on the brain.

Enthusiasm is fine. It is one of the necessary attributes of a militant class. But not enthusiasm alone. There was enthusiasm aplenty in the Reign of Terror, and the Paris Commune. But it was mob enthusiasm. We must guard against this.

The Russian Revolution is an inspiration to the workers of every land in the fight for freedom. Even though it should end in a "colossal massacre," or "blood bath," as some of our quasi-intellectuals gleefully predict, the effort has been well worth while. But we must not forget that we can learn from their defects as well as from their victories. Indeed, we can learn more. If all we had to do was to emulate the fame and follow the example of Spartan and Bolshevik, we would have an exciting time while it lasted. But soon we might rue it. We are not strong enough. We must await a favorable condition. How are we going to get it? By making Socialists. By teaching our fellow workers the nature of the system we want to abolish. When a sufficient number understand this the rest will be easy.

They have Revolution in Russia, but at what a cost? Thousands wiped out of existence through the ignorance of their fellow men. Were the majority of Russian workers solid for Socialist principles no nation, nor group of nations, could thwart their efforts. They would not be compelled to accept as allies the factions opposed to them. They would not have to accept "Tilsit peaces," or shake the bloody hand of capitalist Europe. These are the defeats that we can learn from. These are the obstacles that we must shun.

Instead of hollering ourselves hoarse about the virtues of mass action that can do something spectacular, and not understand why we do it, let us work in the sphere in which we find ourselves and teach Socialism to others of our class. We do not contend that a majority of the workers must understand every chapter of Marx's "Capital." Re-

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