

Correspondence

"BY THE WAY."

Editor, Clarion,—Replying to "C's" rejoinder to my criticism in the issue of December 17th.

Careful perusal of his article in the issue of January 2nd has not cleared up anything. On the contrary, excluding what he describes as "weird stuff" from consideration, the rest of the article contains contradictions, mis-statements and understatement that should not be allowed to pass without protest.

The recognition of the existence of a class-struggle based on the irreconcilable interests of master and slave is a fundamental principle of Marxian Socialism—the only kind that the S. P. of C. endorses, on the ground that it furnishes the key to the solution of all the problems raised by capitalism. To quote our platform, it is "an irrepressible conflict of interest between capitalist and worker" which "necessarily expresses itself as a struggle for political supremacy." This struggle is imposed on the working class by virtue of the fact that "the capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-swelling stream of profits and to the worker an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation." The goal of the struggle, via the capture of political power from the capitalist class, is the socialization of all productive powers functioning as capital. But—"so long as the capitalist class remains in possession of the reins of government all the powers of the State will be used to protect and defend its property rights in the means of wealth production and its control of the product of labor." That presentation has always appeared to me as concise, clear and uncompromising a statement of the actual, fundamental condition of modern society that it was possible to render in print. There is no camouflage about it, but a statement of the bare facts and essential outlines. What kind of a "class struggle" does "C" present to us?

His opening paragraph is weak and inconclusive. Here is a brief summary: "The working class comes into existence as the result of the victory of machine production over handicraft production, under the pressure of class needs has developed its own class consciousness, a class viewpoint and a class philosophy of its own." There he leaves it. Not a word or a hint of the object of its class aspirations (except for a reference to vague "improvements") or a reference to the fact that, like Ishmael, in the class struggle its hand is against every man and every man's hand against it. Is there any neutral ground?

In the next column we have the following:—"There is a bitter, competitive life between individuals, between classes, between the national entities; concurrently there exists a condition of world-wide mutual dependence due to an interlocking system of economic relations such as calls for a pooling of the world's resources in the common interest. The latter condition is the result of a change in the industrial arts; the former is a condition of life which suited a state of the industrial arts now passed away . . . (Emphasis mine—J.H.B.)

So the "bitter competitive life" of today has no foundation in existing economic conditions, but is a hang-over, a psychological aberration, which had its genesis and justification in the "small, self-sustaining economy of the pre-machine age and handicraft." How it was possible for a "self-sustaining" method of production to produce a "bitter competitive life" that would continue with increasing virulence long after its alleged "cause" had disappeared from the scene is a problem of weighty import indeed!

"Whether control is seized by violence or by legal means, both must alike have the massed opinion of the community in support of the social programme." (Third col.) "Labor has not had the community point of view; it has not ranged itself with the community and become initiating and authoritative against the system of capitalism." (Fifth col: emphasis mine—J.H.B.) What does all this "community" clap-trap amount to? What is our modern "community"? An aggregation of human beings, divided into classes and sub-classes, manifesting economic antagonisms, soaked in prejudices mutually hostile and exclusive, leavened with sloppy humanitarianism, insulting charity and religious hypocrisy. Tuxis, Rotary, Kiwanians, Gyro and such-like aggregations of the business fraternity mouthing "communityism," dispensing charity and preaching patriotism as a mental foil to their normal occupation of getting the best of their neighbors; Red Cross organizations collecting funds ostensibly for the relief of the war-torn and loaning them for the purchase of munitions and military equipment for the suppression of the first Workers' Republic; medical associations proclaiming their self-sacrifice for the public health and combating every new method or school of thought in the art of healing or prevention of sickness that threatens their privileges and income; associations of scientific men, equally vociferous in their zeal for the welfare and progress of the "com-

munity," bending all their energies to the discovery of new and more potent means of destroying similar "communities"; the Salvation Army, most vociferous of all, advertising its "social service" with the brass band and raking in the dollars and increasing the existent misery by its emigration-immigration schemes and its sweatshops—each and all of them will accept the others as worthy co-workers in "community service" and "community ideals, and each and every one staunchly upholds the system that produces the evils they bewail. And at the bottom of all this, vastly outnumbering the superincumbent horde of parasites, the object of their loud vicifications and scanty ministrations—the working class, the creator of all values, of a social system reared on the product of its labor, with no hope or prospect under that system but "an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation." What community of interest have they with "C's" "community"? As a slave class they need freedom. Who will aid them—the "Community"? The "community" is based on their slavery. "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole super-incumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air." (Communist Manifesto.) The co-operation of other classes in the struggle of the working class for emancipation is impossible. They exist and owe their dominant position solely to the fact that labor is exploited and enslaved. A real community, common in economic interests, will never exist until the basis of the present kaleidoscope of conflicting interests mis-called a community has been "sprung into the air" and swept away by the "immense majority in the interest of the immense majority." That basis is the modern slave market, the buying and selling of labor power, the exploitation of labor. To say that there is an alternative way, that co-operation with the other elements of the existing "community" is possible, is to obscure and deny the class struggle, and an attempt to divert labor from its revolutionary objective to the futile bogs and swamps of middle-class reform.

"C" takes exception to my characterization of his proposals as "slow changes in social viewpoints and patchwork reforms." He says he used the term "gradualism." Well, let it go at that. "A rose by any other name—" Then a long paragraph is devoted to a recital of this process in action. The list could be indefinitely extended, and protagonists of each reform have, as does "C," proclaimed their pet projects as steps in advance to that much-to-be desired future of ease and plenty for all. What do they all amount to? Reduction of the hours of exploitation has, under the stress of competition, but resulted in the introduction of labor-saving machines with whose tireless pace the worker must keep step or drop out. Those past their physical prime are not wanted. The energy and "pep" of youth are needed to maintain the pace, and as they drop out with exhausted vitality their places are quickly filled. The ever-increasing number of unemployed acts as an effective brake on the demands of the employed for better treatment, and, from a class viewpoint, the employing class is all to the good. All legislation affecting the conditions under which the workers labor has its origin in the foresight of a few of the ruling class (such as Lord Shaftsbury, who perceived that the unbridled exploitation of the workers in mill, mine and factory was fast killing the goose that laid the golden eggs of profit, and if the profit system was to continue the limits of human endurance must be recognized). Hospitals and public clinics are as much a safeguard to the health of the ruling class by prevention of contagion as to the health of the workers. The harnessing of science to industry demanded a supply of educated workers, and the demand was recognized and met by legislation, and is constantly being reinforced to keep step with new applications of science. Other reforms, such as the extension of the franchise (carefully adjusted, however, to ensure that the workers do not secure "undue" representation), repeal of the anti-combine laws, the corn laws, etc., have all been initiated by the ruling class, either in response to the needs of their growing industries or, being first-class-vote catchers, as weapons against their opponents in party warfare.

"Has all this been the work of masters and slaves"? says "C." Bah! let us not make a perverted use of words in seriousness." Can "C" imagine a similar state of affairs in a class-less society—or anything different in a modern class society based on machine production? Perhaps he can. One afflicted to such an extent as he with the "community" bug sees strange things.

"Push the class struggle in a civilized way," says he. Since the dawn of civilization what has been "the civilized way"? What is it but a long, monotonous record of force, the oppression of the weak by the strong, the brutal victory of might over the concepts of right, between nations as between classes, and man and man? Was the recent war not a "civilized" war, and are not the nations preparing with all due haste for another still more "civilized"?

The modern arms of precision in the hands of "anaemic" workers were as effective in the great war as if their manipulators had the physique of professional strong men. Mental lethargy can be awakened and dispelled under the stress of impelling social conditions now as previously. Whatever its shortcomings may be (and reformism is the most outstanding) the present political position of the

Labor Party in Great Britain does not seem to reflect the activities of a working class "anaemic, stunted physically and mentally, and morally degraded."

If the activities reflected in the enactment of endless reforms are properly to be regarded as "preparations, if unconsciously designed ones, for the social revolution," where are we today? Has the condition of the working class been materially or appreciably improved in relation to that of the capitalist class, or in relation to the possibilities of well-being latent in the development of industry that has proceeded at breakneck speed during the production of these "preparations"? Has the worker a more secure livelihood, less cause for worry and anxiety in the present and for the future? The war is over, and "the outbreak of peace" has brought a new "normalcy." Let conditions speak for themselves and provide the answer. Unemployment, scanty doles, lengthening of the working day, assaults on the safeguards laboriously erected around the worker's life, limb and health in his occupation are the order of the day.

In col. 4, "C" pays tribute to the influence of "luck" and "fate" in life. As Com. Harrington put it recently from the platform, society moves in obedience to definite laws and regulations that are inherent in the material processes and conditions under which and by means of which it maintains itself. Nothing happens by "luck;" "fate" can only properly be used to describe the inevitable outcome of the operation of inexorable social-economic laws. "C's" "fundamental insight into life" is apparently only an impressive euphemism for a dreary exhalation induced by mental excursions into the nebulous realms of metaphysics.

The "issues" raised by "C" are old ones. There is nothing new about them. The writer remembers the "good old times" of fifteen years ago, when we were actively and joyously engaged in the dissection and analysis of this same reform bug wherever it showed its head, whether outside or inside the party ranks, and it is mainly due to that activity and keen combativeness that Canada up to the present has been largely free from the curse of reformist "labor" parties. The short life and restricted and waning influence of such as have sprouted up (generally under very questionable auspices) is evidence that our task was well and thoroughly accomplished. Perhaps it would be all to the good, from a party standpoint, if we were to go through the same experience once more, but I think that there is small chance of that. The bug is too dead to make the task of resurrection a pleasant one for any so minded.

J. H. B.

P.S. The printer made a ludicrous mistake in rendering my letter in the issue of Dec. 16. Paragraph 2, line 4, "making" should read "murdering."

J. H. B.

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