

Economic and Menshevik Determinism

By MAURICE BLUMLEIN

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At the time of the French Revolution the bourgeoisie at least did a real service to society. It was not only a basic factor in abolishing feudal privilege, but it also had a constructive program and gave to society a one-class arrangement with relative freedom; moreover, it must be borne in mind that an industrial proletariat did not yet exist, that there was only an agricultural proletariat. Marx said as late as 1848: "It is quite evident and equally borne out by the history of all modern countries, that the agricultural population, in consequence of its dispersion over a great space, and of the difficulty of bringing about an agreement among any considerable portion of it, can never attempt a successful independent movement; they require the initiatory impulse of the more concentrated, more enlightened, more easily moved people of the towns." Thus the motive force of the French Revolution was furnished by the physical power of the exploited peasantry under the leadership of the bourgeoisie of the cities.

The fact that the middle class ideal proved eventually to be a transient makeshift, does not affect its validity in the case of the pioneer nations. Nor does it seem possible to deny that the middle-class form is better suited than any other to small-scale production; had production not progressed beyond that stage, the personal union of earning and owning in each individual might have remained the best solution.

As the Russian bourgeoisie can no longer fulfill any such useful functions today, the only thing that it could accomplish would be to develop a revolutionary consciousness where it already existed, and at the same time try its best to preserve the class system as long as possible, a task which it will at all times take up without requiring any special encouragement.

It is contended, also, that we cannot abolish class control until it shall have reached a stage where it is no longer able to fulfill the function of production; in other words when the stage is reached that the forces of production become so great that the maintenance of class relations can be preserved only by limiting production. When such a condition has been reached it is then conceded by the Menshevik scientist that the overthrow of class rule becomes necessary, that this is economically sound because the one-class system will then be more productive since it does away with a system of production based on artificial curtailment.

This interpretation sins in overlooking the fact that when the capitalist class is forced to limit production, it does not see the error of its ways and abdicates; it is then in a situation where the world is too small for all the bourgeois groups or nations; this ends the international harmony of the bourgeoisie and splits it into two contending forces. Each of these will attempt to avoid the need of limiting production at home by expanding the outlet abroad; each will aim to maintain the condition of its further existence at the expense of the other, by the defeat of the competing group so as to attain world domination, i.e., the largest possible sphere for the distribution of its products and its capital. And after that they would have nothing better to offer than to play the same game over again from the beginning, by another splitting up and another era of military glory.

Besides in this process of self-preservation, by splitting the bourgeois world into two camps, the forces of society are employed destructively on a maximum scale, so that during the contest itself the forces of production are engaged to their fullest capacity. Thus instead of abdication on account of limitation of the forces of production, we get war and the fullest expansion of production.

Furthermore, Socialism, when it is installed, will not be automatically more productive than capitalism, but will have to use its forces for protection in order to defend itself against capitalism

invading from without, with its forces of production fully employed and organized to destroy the Socialist state. In the course of this struggle, too, the capitalist state will not be undermined by compulsory limitation of production.

Another contention to be dealt with is that as Russia still consists of many small units of production and few large ones, the conditions for social ownership and operation are not yet present. This means that there is still a good-sized middle class in Russia and a small-sized capitalist class. But here as elsewhere the middle class has been ground into impotence between the the upper millstone of modern big capital and the nether millstone of an industrial proletariat with a constructive program. No middle class anywhere can offer even a temporary solution at this late date; for it is a declining class, and cannot perform a socially useful function, as it did in days gone by before production on a large scale by big capital had taken the lead, and also before a permanent industrial proletariat was fully developed and had become conscious of its destiny of social emancipation. The middle-class principle and middle-class ideals are utterly unsocial and useless today, quite irrespective of the industrial stage or degree of development.

Presumably, the Menshevik position, therefore, is that the proletariat should perform the role of

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by even the moderate members of the Provisional Government as a dangerous reactionary." In all this there is not an atom of fact. Muraviev was an army lieutenant, who rose to a captaincy under Kerensky, for whom he organized the shock battalions in the summer of 1917. And Schneour, the provocateur, who was a member of the Bolshevik peace delegation at Brest-Litovsk, was discovered to be a provocateur, and imprisoned by the Bolsheviks themselves.

It is perfectly true, as the Commissar of Justice said: "Our chief enemies are not the Cadets. Our most irreconcilable opponents are the Moderate Socialists." The truth of this statement cannot be more clearly shown than by the way Mr. Spargo, taking the position of the Moderate "Socialists," distorts the facts in his attack on Bolshevism.

It all comes down to a question of What is Socialism? Some years ago Mr. Spargo wrote a Life of Karl Marx which was received with hilarity by practically all Marxian circles the world over, and especially in Germany. In the present work he still persists in foisting on the world his own discredited caricature of Marx, and of Socialism, plentifully sprinkled with quotations devoid of their original meaning, and grossly misinterpreted.

I could go on indefinitely quoting and commenting upon this book, had I space and the inclination. It is only fair to say that Mr. Spargo in his ignorance often presents Bolshevism in what he thinks is an evil light, but which actually, to workers, will appear very attractive.

But in the last analysis, when the author has ended his veiled hints and thrusts at the Bolsheviks in Russia, his thesis becomes openly an advocacy of bourgeois Liberalism, as opposed to Socialism.

This, for example, is his idea of the way to achieve industrial democracy:

"... Our American labor unions are demanding, and steadily gaining, an increasing share in the actual direction of industry. Joint control by boards composed of representatives of employers, employees, and the general public, is, to an ever-increasing extent determining the conditions of employment, wage standards, work standards, hours of labor, choice and conduct of fore-

watchful waiting while the big capitalist class wipes out small capitalist production; for only after this has taken place is the emancipation of society by the proletariat indicated according to the inevitable laws of economic science. Apparently that means that the highest forms of production must be introduced by the bourgeoisie and cannot be installed by any other agency. If that is the inference, nothing could be further from the truth. The biggest enterprises of late have grown altogether beyond the capacity of privately owned capital and have been undertaken by the political state, with the backing not of individual capitalists but of the nation as a whole. The Panama Canal is a shining example, but since then, in the course of the war period, cases of this kind are sufficiently frequent not to require detailed enumeration.

It is not clear, therefore, why the Russian proletariat should lengthen the time of its industrial slavery as a means of social emancipation. The abolition of the class control of industry and production should be the means of installing the biggest and best forms of production and distribution by the industrial state. And this will then be done by a one-class government instead of by mass agony. The state will have to perform the work that was done elsewhere by the big capitalist class, and it will do this much more quickly and thoroughly by borrowing the equipment of the other advanced nations, if not betrayed previously by the world proletariat.

men, and many other matters of vital importance to the wage-earners."

And here is the path he points to us as the high-road to Social Revolution:

"... The striving of modern democracy for the peaceful organization of the world, for disarmament, a league of nations, and, in general, the supplanting of force of arms by the force of reason and morality."

SATURDAY REVIEW, APRIL 5

Mr. Lloyd George is one of the most reckless electioneers that the democratic system has yet produced; and sooner or later he will be punished. Mr. Churchill invented the Chinese labour cry in 1906; which after the election he cynically admitted to be a lie.

The Prime Minister during the last election did promise and vow three things; that should be no more conscription; that Germany should pay the cost of the war; (put by Mr. George at 25,000 millions); and that the Kaiser should be punished. Already it has been discovered by the twenty million simpletons of both sexes who voted, that there is to be conscription for (at least) eighteen months; that Germany cannot pay 25,000 millions, or 5,000 millions; and that the Kaiser will be a very difficult person, not to hang, but to convict any known offense.

Missions have been sent to Russia. But they are secret and have been sent in such a way that Mr. Bonar Law can deny them. The press is being worked, one day to attack the Conference, the next day to praise it.

Germany is being consulted, but in such a way that it can be said with verbal accuracy that no such thing is happening.—J. R. M., in "Common Sense."

First Capitalist: What do you think of the League of Nations?

Second Capitalist: Oh! "Capital," my boy "Capital"!

Class Consciousness

Society is divided into two classes; the shearers and the shorn. We should always be with the former against the latter.