

## SOVIET RUSSIA, FROM THE S. P. OF C. VIEWPOINT.

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familiar to superstitious ages, the personal will, likes and dislikes once attributed to things, the rule of thumb, are all ruled out of the machine process. It is no longer even largely a question of the arbitrary will of the worker, he but attends on the process whose detail working out is calculable and set beforehand. Thought on the process is in terms of mechanical force, pressure, strain, velocity, chemical reaction; is in terms of quantitative precision, known and calculable factors, standardized processes and materials and predetermined output. As is the practice in the application of the scientific method in enquiry into natural phenomena, "the machine process compels attention to phenomena of an impersonal character and to sequences and correlations not dependent for their force on human predilection nor created by habit and custom."

This habit of mind, of thinking in the materialistic terms acquired in work-day activity, tends to pervade all thinking. It asserts itself even when thought is taken of religion, the propositions of which are of another, alien order of thought. The much ado about supernatural powers in religious thinking, to the materialistic habit of thought, seems "so much ado about nothing." In likewise, social institutions and conventions become subject to other criteria than "make-believe". With the passing of time it becomes less and less generally accepted that they are eternally sacred, or have any justification for existence at all, by mere right of prescription, immemorial custom, authoritative enactment or divine ordinance. To the materialist conception, institutions and conventions are social habits, habitual ways of response in which human energies and instinctive impulses are enchannelled; they are a social apparatus of ways and means, instruments for furthering human welfare and, as they function in that respect, well or ill, their right to exist is rated accordingly.

Those interested in the discipline of habituation as a social force, particularly as a causal factor between industrial use and wont and institutional facts, are referred to the "Instinct of Workmanship" and other works of Veblen. His development work in that phase of the "Materialistic conception" is proving the virility of that foundation tenet of Marxian theory.

### Economic Basis of the Class Struggle.

In many other ways the modern productive process has brought into being conditions of life which tend to foster a habit or settled frame of mind inimical to the traditional institutions of the present order. Chief amongst these ways is the conflict of economic interest between the proletarian masses and the capitalist class.

The growth and development of large-scale machine production out of small-scale handicraft production, has divorced the once independent producing masses from ownership in the means of production. Thus have been created vast armies of proletarian wage-workers whose only means of securing a livelihood is to sell their labor power to the capitalist owners of industrial plants. Hence there arises a conflict of class interest over conditions of work and wages. Another factor contributing towards this conflict of interest is, that the means of production are not operated primarily to provide a livelihood for the workers or the community at large. Industries being owned by the capitalist class, the rate and volume of output are necessarily restricted to such point as the market price will guarantee profits for capital investments. As a result there is increasingly a condition among industrial workers of part-time labor and unemployment, low wages and a low standard of livelihood, due to excessive competition on the labor market. Hence, the feeling, and the ideas which correspond to it, on the proletarian side of the conflict tend to take on the nature of a challenge to the institution of capitalist ownership of society's means of wealth production.

In so far as the point is reached of antagonism to the present order, consciously or unconsciously, for very often the revolutionary implications of the standpoint of criticism are not recognized, the new

habits of thought furnish the principles and standards which are the standpoint of criticism. Thus, it is coming to seem a common-sense proposition, not to be objected to with any show of reason, that the means of production should be instrumental in furthering nothing less than the welfare of society as a whole; and that personal labor alone should constitute a claim on the product of industry and not absentee-ownership, whose only evidences of connection with industry are stocks and bonds and shares. Yet the tendency of thought of that "common-sense" is not in the direction of a redistribution of capitalist property, though, as a relic, there is a theory that by raising wages to the point of each worker getting the full product of his toil that end would be achieved. The tendency of thought, however, is towards taking over in common to society as a whole, such industries as are basic, large-scale and operated socially. Among those who are consciously revolutionary to the established order, the new principles and standards of criticism are conceived of as the institutional foundations of the future order of society.

Socialism is of this modern proletariat and, in the domains of social theory and social program is an intellectual reflex of the same compulsion of things in the social environment, elaborated by the findings of modern science in the study of man, his institutions and social organizations. Significantly, socialist theory and program receive greatest acceptance among those laboring in the strictly mechanical trades.

The cultural background of the socialist perspective, or so much as is given by the current situation in the social environment (as so laboriously sketched above), gives to that perspective a social consciousness or a sense of society as a unity: a habit of reasoning along lines of material causation, and of rating institutions according to their functional capacities. So equipped, the Socialist should be peculiarly fitted for taking an objective view of Russian affairs. Nor need his sympathy for a people struggling to reconstruct a new order of life bias his viewpoint; rather, his insight should be keener because he is able to recognise the integrity and social idealism of their motives: because he has an acquaintance with them, in respect of social theory and ideals, intimate and confidential, to which other men are strangers.

### The Point of view.

George Bernard Shaw once said that, to an Englishman, there are only two classes of people in the world—Englishmen and Foreigners. That piece of satire is recognized as a caricature of the English, but yet as performing good service in holding up to ridicule a national trait. If not equally so, yet with almost equal truth the same may be said of all nationals. Shaw's satire serves as a text for the next few remarks.

In studying Russian affairs we must be on our guard against measuring Russian ways of reacting to Russian problems with the yardstick of our own preferences, preferences acquired under racial and individual experiences far different from those of the Russian people. Our standards, being the product of habituation to a different economic, political and social environment, will hardly form a basis for an intelligent criticism of the Russians.

Russian social environment, compact of institutions, and Russian psychology, should be taken into account. The half-feudal, absolutist character of those institutions had been a dominating fact in the lives of the Russian people to the eve of the revolution, and their character, through the centuries, has left its impress on Russian psychology. It is generally recognized by Russians themselves, as well as by those acquainted with them, that though they are a people capable of rising to moods of high exaltation and under that influence to states of intense activity, that yet, perhaps beyond most people of the temperate zones, their characteristic state is one of fatalistic resignation and social inertia. Consequently, when the first white heat of revolutionary ardour had cooled with the passing of the crisis which had called it into being, and with weariness of war and social strife, old social habits began to reassert themselves. The Soviet administration

then fell heir to an enormous drain on its energies in the effort necessary to induce that widely distributed population to continue to see Russia's problem whole, and to enthuse and organize that population for social reconstruction and defense of the revolution. In such a posture of things, what wonder that centralization of power, that bug-a-boo of idealists, blind to the compulsion of circumstances, should naturally take effect.

All of which is to say that in discussing Russian affairs we ought to remember we are foreigners discussing the domestic affairs of a neighboring people, a people, moreover, who had inherited dire distresses from Czarist times prior to the revolution which the old methods of action, the established social institutions, had failed to relieve. In fact, being the root cause of the distresses, those institutions should naturally take effect.

It is to the fact that Russia's problems were institutional problems, as are all social problems at bottom today, that they assume such a baffling and stubborn character. The social process has reached a pass demanding a basic change in the purpose of organized social life in the interest of further progress and human well-being. Things, as it were, are ready—a highly developed state of the industrial arts, modern science, more than a sufficiency of expert technicians, production economists and production managers who even now are directing and overseeing the industrial processes though under the discretionary control of the profit seeking business class—things are ready, but the peoples stand inert in the grip of old social habits and loyalties while the calamities, inherent in the capitalistic organization of social life, prey on them.

The dead hand of the past on the forces of progressive social change! That is why, for one reason, in studying Russian or any other country's affairs, we must apply the historical method. By that method we may discover the underlying forces that work against social progress. Behind every social situation there is a historical background out of which it evolved. Thus every present is related to the past as effect to a cause. All societies are compact of such things as institutions, customs and tradition, conventional habits of life and thought whose influence in retarding change must be considered. Besides the internal factors in the Russian situation, there are also external influences affecting it. It must be viewed as an arbitrarily selected section of a larger whole, as a part of a world process in which incidents, events, and social movements are surface indications of underlying forces of which, in this age, the great characteristic forces are economic.

Much of present anxiety, or of exultation as the case may be, would not prevail at the so-called Soviet compromises with capitalism if the habit of a large, detached, historical perspective were more prevalent. In that respect, it may be well to quote the historian John Richard Green: "Writing of history," he says, "or its interpretation, needs philosophic insight or it becomes a mere chronicle of events. . . . Proportion is apt to be forgotten and the greater currents of history to be lost, while intellectual and moral forces which tell only on long intervals of time are overlooked in the crowd of minor incidents which affect human action directly and at once." Or, we might quote Premier Lenin, when, in one of revolutionary Russia's darkest hours, because he was capable of rising to a historical perspective, he, calmly, in seer-like mood made the following affirmation to Colonel Robins, United States chief of Red Cross in Russia:

"This system is stronger than yours because it admits reality. It seeks out the sources of daily human work-value and, out of those sources, directly, it creates social control of the state. Our government will be an economic social control for an economic age. It will triumph because it speaks the spirit of the age that now is. . . . You may see foreign bayonets parading across Russia. You may see Russia dark again as it was dark before. But the lightning out of that darkness has destroyed political democracy everywhere. It has destroyed it not by physical striking it, but simply by one flash of revelation of the future."

(To be concluded in our next issue)