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Kodaks by the Way

LABOR Parties, like Cleopatra, have "infinite variety." And also, like her, they cause much confusion among their admirers. They come and go, wavering like moonlight on a lake, with every disturbance of the moment, until the wood of the class issue disappears in the forest of emergency legislation.

Why this confusion? Why this running after false gods? Patently, lack of knowledge of the class issue. For, if that issue were understood, the passing incidentals of labor exigencies would melt like mist in the morning sun. Yet that is but a statement carrying no explanation. Since, if that issue were understood, we should be on the verge of the new society. And conversely, not being understood, the new society is not a thing of the immediate future. It is a more dilatory affair than we thought.

Most of us came out the "last war" with the feeling that the capitalist system was done for. We could not see—perhaps do not yet see—how it could stand the shock and strain of peace dissensions. Yet it stands, apparently more concentrated in the means of life and power than ever. That had to be accounted for. And accounting it earned for the purely Socialist Parties the heavy-weight title of "reactionary." From the alleged failure of the Socialists to "make good," to profit by the capitalist "crisis," to "lead the masses to victory," came new bodies with weird methods of attack, and still weirder notions of virility. Not that the Socialist Parties could make good, not that there was a crisis, or the slightest chance of victory. The idea itself proves its own futility. But because that hope and belief was there and was found wanting; progressive reaction discarded the old propaganda of knowledge and turned to the more alluring vintage of direct means. And direct means led—as it could not fail to lead—by the meandering usages of opportunism, to the blind alley of compromise. Reform of parties; reform of program and policy; reform of method and tactic—all were called to book, and new views of attack and initiative were culled from the drastic change and sad experience that confronted the decaying hopes of that "new world after the war." So we stand to-day, divided and embittered, each nursing his own prejudice and animosity; each "under his own vine and fig tree."

But the vine and fig tree of individualism has completely gone by the board. Our issue, the class issue, is a social issue, caring nothing for man or group. It is an international society, heedless of nation or empire, or their exigencies. And in the terms of social unity it must proceed. There is no room for this or that idealism; for this or that panacea; for this or that pursuit of eclectic good; for this or that visioning of common aim. That is but begging the question. For the common aim is of the blood of unity, and unity pulses with the vim and strength of social vicissitude. That unity is to be achieved through the burning experience of social conditions, the similitude of aim mirroring the similitude of condition. It is not the progeny of reason, though reason is a factor in its promotion. It is not the result of force, though force may be a side-issue of its progress. It is not a medley of contrivance, although it has human directness. It is born of the compelling agencies of social forces and conditions. It is vitalised by the hardening antagonisms of the class struggle, and fanned continually by the abortive restrictions of imperialist necessity. We are

pried loose from our ancient preconceptions by the new order of living conditions. Our individualist traditions are scattered by the trade winds of monopolist activities. Our cherished convictions and their visible institutional forms are laid low by the expansive forces of the developing machine, and driven more and more insistently into the orbit of high finance. We are drawn into a common plane of social perception, as we have already been herded in the common reality of economic necessity.

We may say what Socialism is, but who can divine the changes and chances on the road of its accomplishment? Because Socialism (as a concept) is static and factual, while the detail of its becoming is dynamic and circumstantial. And it is just this circumstantial negation of our social theorising which has divided us into weak and struggling factions, and has turned the one time comely edifice of the socialist conception into a hissing and a bye-word. And because of the disappointments engendered by a vanishing ideal we turn to other and seemingly more promising means for its fulfilment, seeking in the darkening conditions of our time the proofs to justify our new conditioning of things.

But it is forgotten that the circumstantial negation of our theorising is not the same thing as the circumstantial negation of reality. It is not the socialist conception which requires whitening; it is only our concept of it which needs to be brought into harmony with the facts. The fact itself is true enough. It is our idea that is at fault, a matter abundantly evident in the shifty programmes and emergency policies of the labor parties of to-day. And by the same token, until that harmony is effected we batter at the doors of method in vain. For, just as we do not get Socialism, because we do not understand it, so we do not get a united front because we do not understand our social organisation and its necessary relationships. The one is a consequence of the other. And it is just as futile to expect Socialism without understanding it as it is impossible to obtain unity without the precognition of our social status, and its resultant clear cut issue of class. We are slaves in bond, and our first necessity is to crush the lie that we are free. That done, the scales shall fall from our eyes. That not done, we are blind men, wandering among the tombs of tradition.

To crush that lie brings us to the Socialist position and its tactics. Since the question is immediate: How is it to be done? Clearly not by trying to hammer into the head of a soc-disant freeman the notion that he is a slave. Clearly not by expecting the schools of initiative to accept a philosophy apparently antagonistic to experience and training. Clearly not by offering us certain plants from the tatter demalion rafts of expediency, in hope that thereby we may occupy a common platform. And, just as clearly, not by counting the particular heads of specific politics, in the belief that custom shall vindicate our choice. That is not the role of custom, but of material fact, out of which proceeds both the custom and its necessity. The teaching of Socialism is that out of the whole body of historic material of the time, develop the forces and influences which negate the conditions of the time, abrogating their basis use and necessity, and thereby annulling their power, and developing through the stress and strain of new needs and new necessities, the forces and influences which secure and fulfil their satisfaction.

And that the agents of this process—those forces and influences—are the material conditions and capacities of production, and the human interests of the several components of the social organisation. And it teaches further—directly or by implication—that the human element does not impose its will or control upon the process, except and until it becomes conscious of the impinging contradictions of the conflicting forces of society. That is to say that man reacts to the stubborn momentae of conditions only through the modus vivendi of experience, modifying those conditions through the thwarting interventions of classic inheritance.

We may be glad and rejoice that labor has achieved a revolution, and a government; has increased its representation, its vote, and its spectacularisms. But only as they bear witness to the indomitability of humanity. They are not indicative of the near triumph of Socialism. Rather they are symptomatic of the gathering oppressions of the great steam roller of capitalism, crushing the life of the peoples in the bloody wine press of its accumulations. Nor need we fix our eyes upon them to profit by their mistakes. For assuredly the future shall not be called upon to do what it is required of the present. The one lesson they convey is the utter failure of the cross-roads system, and the futility of the forced marches of misunderstanding. Society is a protean complex in motion, and the forces of tomorrow will be arrayed and deployed quite otherwise than those of today. Different conditions must call for different modes of procedure, and different answers must be given to their appeal. And if we hope to answer their questioning we must be prepared, not with the simple intimacy of their phenomena, but with the deeper fundament of their conditioning.

Out of that complex will come the forces to vitiate and overrule the capitalist system. It will generate its conflicting interests, crushing the weak in the triumph of the strong. Changing methods will make class interests more desperately implacable; necessity make them more irreconcilable. Thus it shatters the social concepts of "right," "justice," "fairplay," "morality." As it has blotted out individual enterprise with its ruthless competition so the continuation of the process will extinguish the lesser group. Thus "freedom," "initiative," and the "reward of endeavor" wilt in the hot glare of its rivalry. In the pursuit of imperialist ambitions it will subvert the probity of every parliament, as it has already whelmed the vaunted honor of every state. So "liberty" and "democracy," and "social service" are flouted and disrupted. So society becomes more corrupt and vicious; its morals being shaken, its moral code vanquished. So its life becomes more precarious and despicable, its notions of value distorted, the whole fabric of its cherished institutions traduced.

But society cannot continue to exist in depravity and distortion. It is the subvertisation of the very thing it was organised to achieve: social preservation. The social interests and satisfactions voided and set aside, gather to themselves out of the mighty magma of progress, the means and powers of their preservation. While the vitiating of the old system is going on above, the sublimation of the new is being accomplished underneath. And when the countermining of conflicting vested interests has ruined

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