

Rambling Remarks on Revolution

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AN OPEN AIR ADDRESS

ON several occasions you have seen me standing here recommending you to buy our literature. It occurred to me that it would be advisable to let you know something of the contents. For my subject this evening I think a good title would be "Rambling Remarks on Revolution." Most of these remarks are based upon this little pamphlet and what it has suggested to me while I read it. It is the Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada. It sets forth clearly the attitude taken by the party, and in dealing with it I shall endeavor as usual to suit my remarks to the mental capacity of those who are beginning to be interested in the study of scientific Socialism. The well informed students—and we are all students—and always students—will have to exercise patience over my reiteration.

The first edition of this pamphlet appeared fifteen years ago. This is now the fifth edition, so we may take it that any theoretical errors have been corrected, and any obscurities have been clarified.

One of the first questions which an enquirer asks when he meets a Socialist, or when he opens a Socialist book, is "How do they mean to bring about the Revolution?" Now we may as reasonably ask "How do YOU mean to bring it about?" It is your problem in as great a degree as it is the problem of the Socialist. But revolutions are not made, they arise out of certain conditions. I tell you frankly that we cannot hope to outline a revolution. We have to recognize the well-nigh impossibility of such an undertaking. But we can at least try to understand one when it occurs. One thing we can do, we can keep our minds open and flexible in order to recognize conditions when they arise, and to avail ourselves of opportunities when they present themselves. Without study we will never be able to do this. Remember that because a thing has been done in a certain way for many years, or because a system has lasted for many years, it does not prove that that way is the best, or that that system will not change. No, the only thing we can be sure of is change; and so long as perfection is unattainable, so long will there be people devoting every possible minute to attaining it. Such people are revolutionists. True, they are in the minority. Every man with an overmastering idea is in the minority, sometimes even a minority of one. Their ideas meet with apathy in many cases, or with ridicule. I will allude here only to one instance as it was so ably dealt with in the "Clarion" a short time ago. I refer to the timely remarks by Comrade Adrian C. Thrupp against vivisection, and urging the need of revolution in the medical profession. All such minorities are bold and have tenacity of purpose in their endeavors to overrun long established abuses. We should remember that there is no finality to progress. We are in line with progress when we seek to effect the change of a system which can no longer support the masses it has subjugated.

The first change a Socialist seeks to effect is one in the mental attitude of the wage worker. He may not always be wise in his choice of words. Possibly he begins by telling the members of the working class that they are enslaved. I remember well the first time I learned I was a slave, I did not like it. I had accepted as an axiom that I was free to choose my job, the world was wide and I loved to be in it; but experience of the wide world leads me to agree with the Socialist when he tells us we are a slave class, and in the face of bitter opposition tries to press this truth home. His words generally arouse great indignation in the minds of even the poorest. It is not difficult to understand why. Have not our teachers and preachers taught us that contentment with our lot is great gain, and that meekness and humility are the qualities that best become a Christian; and have they not instilled into our being that we are free-born Britons? The country matters not; at school

children are taught to be proud of their country. The little Britisher, ragged and underfed, recites Blake's lines "I am glad that I was born a little British boy." The American citizen, far from the land of his birth though he may be, learns that "All that well becomes a man marks the true American." It comes then as a shock to most people when a Socialist tells them that they are enslaved. But if we once realize this, then our minds are ready to be told how this condition came about and, what presents greater attraction, how to find a way out.

Our literature furnishes this information. I am quoting freely from it, and I would ask you to devote as much time as you can from your wage earning pursuits to this study. We all have at least the elements of education, enough to make us efficient wage slaves and patriotic soldiers. Our masters have provided this for us, and we cannot expect them to do more. It now rests with us to educate ourselves for the accomplishment of our release from wage slavery. No need to say you have not the time nor the money. I cannot believe this when the picture houses are crowded, the hockey matches attended by shouting multitudes, and the literature of the master class finding such a ready sale. But what about any paper that is published in the interests of our own class? If it does not go under, all it can do at the best is to clear expenses. This shows the apathy of the working class towards forwarding their own emancipation.

The little pamphlet I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks is a suitable one for commencing the study of Socialism. I do not wish to deceive you by telling you that it is recreative; it is not. Our purpose is to instruct the workers and show them how certain historical facts have influenced their methods of obtaining a living; to lead them to see that certain effects have been produced by certain causes. Our literature abounds with information which discloses the economic motive underlying every act of the governing class, even every move of the recent fruitless conferences following as a result of the great war and the altered conditions arising out of the peace. You remember how the patriotic orators lauded you as a nation whose people showed such courage, fortitude and sound sense in the recent terrible war. Now we hear the Duke of York announcing that he cannot help being an optimist as he belongs to a nation whose men and women have so bravely and so uncomplainingly endured the even harder trials of peace. The even harder trials of peace! Do you "get" the full significance of this? Are we optimists then because we find peace supportable after the strenuous times of the war?

The Socialist-writers show conclusively that economic conditions are the only causes of war, and they warned us during the war that the outbreak of peace would be as cataclysmic as the outbreak of war; but they did not claim to be optimistic nor prophets for telling us this. You all know how the workers flung themselves into the conflict regardless of the consequences to themselves. You know how master and worker agreed to sink their differences and meet the common foe, the German. Those in what we may call affluent circumstances rallied to such slogans as "My country, British Honor and Justice." The sentimental ones could not resist the appeal of the weaker nations; those on the breadline, the shiftless, the careless, the worthless, perhaps after all had the most defensible reason for going to war. Think what it means to a hungry man to live again, to feel clean and well clad in His Majesty's uniform and to know that his bread would be given and his water would be sure. They were not devoid of sentiment either. They knew those dependant upon them would be relieved from the uncertainty of the periods of depression existing before the war. They became useful to their country. They earned respect as our deliverers. Do you remember one of the posters

with Burns' verse inscribed:

"For gold the merchant ploughs the main,
The farmer tills the manor,
But glory is the soldier's pride,
The soldier's wealth is honour."

Small wonder then that they were thrilled. It would take a heart as hard as the heart of Pharaoh not to succumb to this. They went and fought their masters' battles once again, but they were ignorant of the most far-reaching historical fact that victory meant loss to them as workers, for in any war the victorious State has ever been the stronger to oppress its own workers, the defeated State ever the weaker to resist their demands. Many a time have I heard Socialist speakers say this at the commencement of the war. Who shall say in the light of subsequent events, that they did not know? The veterans have experienced the soundness of that statement. As sympathetic human beings we may deplore the war and shudder at the spectacle of man kind butchering each other, but as scientific Socialists we have to study it as an inevitable part of a world process and to a process slaughter is of no moment. Indeed, as far as social advancement is concerned, what we call good times are as deadening to the intellect as a period of war, though we prefer to take a chance on the good times. The great war is over, but do we know the outcome of it yet? The war has not given what it promised. There have been conferences in Europe but no satisfactory solution has yet been found for the problems of Europe. We know not what the outcome will be, only this is certain, that it must carry us towards the social revolution. Are we ready for it? The Socialist Party is trying to prepare the minds of the workers. Every change entails an amount of uncertainty, possibly of suffering. The sounder our knowledge of society and the more people who are willing to give themselves to an understanding of it, the easier will be the transition from capitalism to Socialism. The surest way to make ready for the new order is to learn the life story of the human race, the evolution of human society. Society as it is now is not the same as it was in the past. Throughout the ages there has been a process of growth from the simple to the complex. Savage society decayed because the technique of progress was not sufficiently advanced to enable it to support itself, and the political society of today is dying because it can no longer sustain the masses it has subjugated. I am quoting again from the Manifesto. The wealth of the former society was freedom—access to life's necessities; the wealth of the latter society is subjugated labor—the cause of its disruption. Until labor recognizes its subjugation and abolishes capitalistic exploitation it must remain poor, miserable, degraded, ministering to the pleasure of the ruling classes, a contented slave class. Is there anything more contemptible than a contented slave? Our mission is to rouse the workers, to urge them to put aside apathy and sluggishness. Being ourselves members of the working class we strive to point out the cause of our misery and the reason for the change. There are those of us who yearn for action, for something now. There is neither blame nor wonder to that; but we must submit to the weariness of waiting—weariness indeed—but wait we must. Just as we cannot put back the hand of time, neither can we advance it. Working class history is red with the blood of those who have revolted on impulse before the fulness of time. I may cite the case of the Spartacans in the days of ancient Rome. They revolted and managed to hold the master class at bay for years, but failed and were ruthlessly crushed in the end because society was not developed on the only basis on which freedom can flourish—socialization of resources and production; social ownership and administration and the consequent elimination of class distinction. This point we must come to before we can be free. As long as you