

Economic and Menshevik Determinism

By MAURICE BLUMLEIN

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That the Russian people are ready mentally for a system without class-rule can hardly be questioned; that is the message of the Revolution.

Therefore we come to the final point of our problem: Why do the Mensheviks say that the material conditions are not yet ripe for the Social Revolution?

They contend that Russia has a big agricultural proletariat but a proportionately small industrial proletariat, that further industrialization under the supremacy of the bourgeoisie is still necessary so as to reach the stage arrived at in the advanced nations, such as England, Germany, etc.

But why must a big or preponderating portion of the country be industrialized? Because it brings the workers together, makes them a homogeneous unit, and enables them to become conscious of their relation to each other as members of a class. In other words, it is the instrumentality by which the mental equipment and message of Marx and Engels is conveyed to the masses. The average individual cannot acquire a knowledge of socialist philosophy by analysis and abstract thought, and if that were the only way in which the emancipation could take place, it might never occur.

But the worker learns these things very concretely. "Pressure and more pressure until the cause penetrates to the consciousness."

Nevertheless, if industrialization heretofore has served the purpose of developing mental consciousness by exerting pressure intensively and extensively, it is also true that the Russians have arrived at that condition of mind already, so that the bourgeoisie could only give them what they had attained previously, besides handing them a number of other things which the workers would rather not have.

Moreover, there is a very good reason why Russia does not need the same degree of industrial development as the western nations in order to become a revolutionary mass. The industry that has been introduced came at a late stage, is on a big scale, and did not have to be built up from small beginnings. In other words, the Russians, just as in the case of the Japanese, adopted the completed result that it took the other nations a much longer time to find by experimentation and

pioneer work, and together with it they similarly adopted the philosophy and economics of Socialism.

Therefore a much smaller proportion of industry in Russia was able to furnish a much larger proportion of revolutionary understanding than in the nations where these processes first occurred. Russia, consequently, does not have to run through the whole gamut of class relations. What was historically inevitable in the pioneer nations, namely a high degree of industrialization and pressure by concentration, does not mean that similar prolongation of agony must be duplicated in Russia. For while history is a repetition of the application of certain principles and laws, the manner in which this takes place is not a duplication, but varies with our mental capacity.

No wonder, therefore, that the Russian people could not accept the dictum of the Mensheviks to continue to crucify themselves until some later, more suitable time. What on earth the bourgeoisie was to do for them under such circumstances had better be left to a bourgeois social scientist to explain rather than a revolutionary Socialist.

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Morals vs. Profits

The capitalist is a very moral person. You can tell this by what he says (rather than by what he does), also by what others say of him, particularly preachers and fake reformers of society. The capitalist and those who speak for him can talk in the most idealistic terms, he can use such words as "democracy," "justice," "liberty," "equality," etc., until one is simply astounded at the breadth of vision he displays and his deep-seated "human interest."

That is, he can do this so long as he does not have to talk of the real facts of life. But the moment he tries to combine his high ideals with the real problems presented by the struggle between himself and his workmen over wages, hours, etc., the other side of his character comes to the front, try as he will to hide it, and can easily be detected by anyone who is even moderately critical of what he reads.

The Union League Club of Chicago has published a pamphlet by Herbert T. Perkins of the International Harvester Co., under the title "The Manufacturer's Wage Problem." Summed up, the problem is how to keep the workers contented, make a "fair" profit, find a market for his goods, and absorb the returning soldiers in industry. Mr. Perkins recognizes the bigness of the problem when he says: "He would indeed be more than a man who could measure the problem and fit its answer. . . ."

Mr. Perkins, in attempting to analyze the situation, is obliged to deal with facts, and in so doing he brings out the conflict between the capitalist's word-morality and his economic brutality. He does not do this intentionally, however. Throughout the pamphlet he speaks in terms of idealism.

Here is a sample. He says:

"Too many employers, with their minds more on the experience of the past than the promise of the future, have been watching anxiously and often nervously, the constant rise in money wages. The thought has been borne strongly in upon them that the historical and therefore the most natural and correct method of meeting the period of declining business and profits is through the prompt reduction of the wage rate attained through the stimulation of these past years of conflict."

There is considerable to be learned from this paragraph if we will ponder over it. In the first place we learn that the "historical" method of preventing a reduction of profits in times of business depression is to reduce wages. By "histori-

cal," Mr. Perkins simply means that it has been the customary method of the past. Now, all workers who have experienced reductions of wages, or partial or complete unemployment during such times know what a hardship it is. And, no doubt, Mr. Capitalist also weeps when he thinks of the hardships resulting from layoffs and wage reductions, but we have noticed that he seems to bear this sorrow much easier than the sorrow of having profits reduced. We have noticed that when there is reduction or threatened reduction of profits, Mr. Capitalist not only becomes "nervous" but positively hysterical.

Mr. Perkins, however, believes that the sacrifices which both capitalist and worker, as he says, have made during the war, has bred a higher spirit. Directly following the quotation above, he emphasizes the following remark:

"It does not seem possible, however, that such a thought can be the proper immediate reaction of peace to the spirit which impelled the United States to take up arms in the fight against the Central Powers."

Alas, he who expects the capitalist to live up to the ideals which he is wont to voice at banquets, is doomed to disappointment. These things will never do for the hard realities of business conduct. Already we hear of an organization of soldiers in the same city from which this pamphlet came, Chicago, for the purpose of trying to obtain employment for returned men. We also hear that the organization is not approved by the military authorities. But much as Mr. Perkins seems to wish that the employers will refrain from reducing wages because of the stopping of the war, he is finally obliged to admit that it may be necessary. He says:

"If the worst comes and through the pressure of competition from abroad, it becomes evident that with all other resources exhausted, general employment and consequently general prosperity can only be maintained by a decline in commodity wage, such further adjustment must necessarily follow."

By "commodity wage" Mr. Perkins means the actual amount of commodities which wages will purchase. He therefore means to say that a reduction in the living standard of the worker may be necessary. But Mr. Perkins, if the capitalist has imbibed so much "democracy," we may at least confidently expect that he will not do this until, as you say, "all other expedients are exhausted." We shall expect him to first give up his palatial

Mining Conditions in Great Britain

[Extracted From a Scottish Newspaper]

At Saturday's sitting of the Coal Commission, Mr. John Robertson, chairman of the Scottish Union of Mine Workers, said that mining was admitted to be a dangerous occupation, but even by persons living in mining districts the danger was not fully realized. The number of persons employed in and about the mines of the United Kingdom was fully 1,000,000. Fifty-five thousand had been killed in fifty years, and from 1907 to 1916 there was a total of 12,400 killed. Persons injured in 1913 totalled 176,868, and in 1914, 158,862. In twenty years there was a total of at least 3-1-4 millions. Mining was more deadly than war, said Mr. Robertson: the miner was always on active service; always in the trenches. The totals given did not include what the miner paid by disease in his occupation. He then went on to relate details of living conditions.

The kept capitalist press of Canada, in order to discredit the struggles of British labor for better conditions, characterizing them as the result of materialistic greed, has been carrying on a regular line of dope on the extravagancies of the British working classes, because of possession of unaccustomed wealth, through high wages. We all remember the stories of the miner's wife buying three pianos, which were served up to us with variations. Mr. Robertson quoted statistics to show that over the period of five years the cost of living had risen by 3s 6d, while the wages rose

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mansions, his country clubs, his yachts, his retinue of servants and his kept mistresses before he burdens himself with the sorrow of knowing that his workmen and their children are suffering privation. We have a suspicion, however, that if we ever see such things it will be in an opium joint.

Is there any lesson for workmen to learn from all this? Yes: there is one big lesson, and that is, that the way to settle the "Manufacturer's Wage Problem" is to institute a system of society in which there will be no "manufacturer" (capitalist) and no wages. A form of society where the producers will receive their remuneration, not in the form of a wage paid by a capitalist, but as a remuneration for services, tendered by society, for service rendered to society. They are doing it in Russia.