

# The Curtain Call

By W. A. P.

IT would seem that the working class movement progresses, as it were, in a series of waves: flood tides and backwashes; periods of intense activity followed by periods of reaction and pessimism.

At anyrate this is what happened during and following the revolutionary year of '48 in Europe; during and following the Paris Commune of '71; and, coming down to strictly modern days, during and following the post-armistice period of 1918-20. Reservations might be made respecting the last-named, not the least of which would take account of Russia from 1917 forward.

This apart, however, considered as a generalization, the proposition holds good. Furthermore, in the writer's opinion, it also can be considered acceptable that just so soon as the period of reaction sets in the gods of master class society, being extremely jealous gods, call for vengeance, bloody and dire.

Thus Europe's mad '48, the blood-bath of the Commune and the still current staggering reaction of the "after-the-war" reconstruction era from Horthy and Mussolini to the Palmer raids and the Nova Scotia of Besco.

These few rambling and probably not altogether precisely scientific thoughts are prompted by a request from ye editor that I write (a business I confess myself rusty at) a short screed for the valedictory issue of what we have come to regard somewhat in the light of an institution that should be with us always. Despite the repressions of the hysterical war period and the many vicissitudes of prior times the "Clarion" always managed to weather the storm, and although justifiable criticism at this late hour on errors of omission and commission might exist, nevertheless it functioned to the working class movement (of this continent particularly) like a beacon light to the storm-buffed mariner.

And now it pronounces its adieu at a time when reaction stalks rampant, and the whips of capitalism's offended gods are cracking from the Balkans to the China coast. At a time, indeed, when conservatism makes a grand rally against pervasive influence of new ideas and the new marshalling of facts in the hands of science.

Have we not had the ludicrous spectacle of a sov-

ereign state in the greatest republic of the world conducting a persecution against a young school teacher who sought to tell the story of "The Triumph of Life" to the natural confounding of the other story of a talking serpent, standing on the tip of his tail and cajoling the first woman with a morsel of spicy fruit? Or of still another state of the same republic instituting an almost similar prosecution against the use of an elementary chemistry text book, because, forsooth, therein the processes of distillation (without a knowledge of which pure water is impossible!) and fermentation are described? Or even of the great republic itself screeching its lamentable intolerance from the fanatical proponents of the Volstead Act to the Ku Klux Klan and the American Legion?

It is in this reeking atmosphere that the "Clarion" takes its curtain call. As to its usefulness in times past no student of the proletarian movement, however he may have disagreed upon occasion, will have any doubts. One also is of the opinion that if ever it were needed it is now. What is to take its place? And what shall be the successor of the group which produced and maintained it? At the moment the answer is difficult and speculation more or less holds sway.

Certain it is that in any previous period of reaction and pessimism the working class movement has proceeded slowly but surely to repair its battered defenses and restore its demolished institutions. Not always in accordance with the edicts of its high priests or the visions of its seers; but according to time, place and condition it has hammered out new weapons, has beaten new trails through the forests of ignorance and has moved—because it had to—nearer and yet nearer to the day when man's economic agencies shall be his servant and not his master.

Master class jubilation has even risen with all reactions, a jubilation coupled with jeers for an enemy considered eternally vanquished, a jubilation always perversely shortlived.

Whatever it may be that shall rise to succeed the "Clarion"—a working class theoretical finger-post for some twenty years—the work performed by it shall surely not be forgotten, for its harvest ripens even now on every hand.

## The Final Formation

EVER since the Russian revolution failed to materialize its supposed promise of a speedy triumph for the working class, attention has been steadily turning away from the single aim and steadfast principles of socialism to the dubious means of reform and the specious ways of compromise. Communism and its "International" yielded to the pressure of world events. Across war stricken Europe their romantic uprisings were suppressed, red and ruthless, by the patriot bands of Empire. Their very immaturity clearing the rough ways of hoary tradition for the new shibboleths of the same ruling class. Everywhere rings the clash of war, striving for autocratic Imperialism. Everywhere the march of armed men, widening the frontiers of Empire. Everywhere the call of the nations, bending the world to their "law." Everywhere labor, under its chosen "leaders," roused and beguiled by the metaphoric illusions that gild the yoke of its slavery. And everywhere the false prophets, preaching the expediency of time that is already the exigency of Capital, preaching the United Front amidst unexampled diversities of antagonism; preaching the panaceas of necessity despite the lessons of their inevitable futility, and shouting from the house-tops the inefficiency and failure of Marxian Socialism amidst the daily witness of its truth. Truly, "Lo here, an' lo there" have found their teeming worshippers.

Nevertheless, Marxian analysis of society stands unshaken. And because it is unshaken, hated and feared by sect and party. Clearly, the means of life

are in the possession of the few, for the advantage of the few. And the few, by the very necessities of possession can and will maintain and control that possession against every fashion of reform. Always reform is the interest of property. Never the interest of slaves. Obviously, the great laboring mass of society is poverty stricken and confined, because class possession of the means of life must always work for private gain. By no possibility can social advantage be derived from capitalist property. For as the wealth of capital is the possession of labor, only at the instancy of social understanding will capital surrender its privilege of exploitation. Only dreamers expect miracles; only the romantic believe them. Daily we see the progressive concentration of capital. Daily we feel its increased centralization. Everywhere is the pinch of a moneyless market. Everywhere calculated production curbs human endeavor; everywhere restricted capacity militates against social welfare. Everywhere the increase of gaunt unemployment and steady fall of the social standards of life and living. Wherever we turn the philosophy of Marx is vindicated in the facts of world events. Vindicated with a triumph, whose completeness is manifest in the deep silence of those who would benefit by its demonstrated falsity.

Thus, although capital drags out its term in gathering misery and deprivation, in a hectic weariness of monotony whose solace is the "thrill" of vice, although interest in socialism wanes and the

commodities of time-service make substitute for its principle, still "we mourn not as those who have no hope." For we know that beneath the appearance of things the march of social progress matures the process of emancipating labor from the throes of capital. The economic restrictions of production find reflex in the intolerable conditions of social life. The new ideation of new cycles of development weaves its new pattern of reality, ever more accurate, from the garnered increment of social experience. The old fable, the old tradition, the old conditions are not disproved. They simply vanish before gathered facts, like the mists of morning. The very immensity of the social complex — its insupportable wars; its deadening finance, its crushing monopolies curb man with privation. But they also rouse society to understanding. The ripening progress of material conditions—the "Jove that nods to Jove behind our backs"—by the continued dispossession of property must awaken society to the futility of property. Inexorably, access to the blind caves of revisionism closes, forcing the social complex of interests to the single issue of society. Even now the multifarious programmes of the political have narrowed down to forestalling immediacy—the conservative against the menace of Bolshevism; Liberalism against an Imperialism that imposes its chains, even on the "freedom of contract," and labor, for existence itself. Thus are the lines of the class war drawn, clear and imperative.

At the moment we can point to no definite sign of triumph. For the present circumstances are against us. But only for the present. The class struggle is the final formation of "interest," and it can neither flag nor stay until the society of class has been swept away. Socialism is not a shuttlecock of time and expediency, but the fundamental issue of man and his life. Today we yield to necessity; but the necessity of the social movement continues. Tomorrow the struggle will still be on. And other hands and hopes, keen, vigorous and indomitable to cope with the broad issues of society, will spring from a living magna of human endeavor, and carry the banner of the social commune before the rising ranks of dawning understanding.

That understanding is born of the narrowing down of the problems of existence, and its accompanying concomitant, the knowledge of the stubborn fact. It is not the fruit of verbal education—alone. Nor the result of misery and its expediences. Amidst all the dread portents of change and decay, amidst the confusions of temporisation and party interests, amidst the chaos of current history and the time service of the "lion's providers" (the labor party), the futility of bypaths to socialism and the necessity of proletarian class consciousness stands out like a rock in the midst of the waters, above the rolling wastes of "practical politics." The lesson is clear. To appreciate socialism we must know. To have we must desire. To maintain we must be class conscious. No appeal to unity; no abbreviation of reality; no sentiment of fraternity; no anarchy of the strong arm; no subterranean communism of "preparedness" can even substitute knowledge and understanding. Clear cut and grim, the antics of those antiquities confirm the invincibility of socialist aim and principle. And strengthen us for the struggle anew. On that understanding alone can there be unity and fraternity. For, beyond all contention, we are as we know, and we act as we see.

The cumulative effect of the progressive conditioning of social existence will mature and clarify that issue, and make the message of the "fanatic" vanguard ring like edged steel on the ears of the listening crowd. By the necessities of social existence, that progress cannot be slow, cannot stagnate or be reactionary. Out of that progress advances the appreciation of the social commonwealth. In its dim and seething depths is nurtured the "fiery cross" that will rouse society to social perception. And its stern vicissitudes and inescapable ironies will inspire its bowed but unbroken humanity of slaves with the glorious import of that neglected vision of a neglected genius — "Workers of the world: Unite! Ye have nothing to lose but your chains: A world to gain." R.