

By the Way

THE working class of today, living by working for wages, came into being as a class when large-scale production and the mechanical inventions which initiated the age of machine production had displaced as a characteristic form of industry the handicraft method of production. This working class historically is a new social class and, as might be expected, under the impact of its group experiences, its common needs and conditions of life different from those of other groups in the community, is developing a consciousness of itself as a class. It finds itself faced with problems that affect it as a class, and it could hardly do otherwise than view these problems and all the relevant facts and causal influences, or the proposed remedies and anticipated consequences from a class viewpoint. In course of time there appears a more or less consistent body of social philosophy critical of things as they are and permeated with aspirations for an improved state of things. The common desire for improvement, of course, since the class is made up of individuals, has many individualized expressions, many programmes issuing out of diverse reasonings on the problem.

Used of organic growth, born of historical processes in society analogous to the organic processes in nature, working class consciousness is a response to the stimuli of the environment. In nature, the character of the response depends on the nature of the stimuli and the nature of the organism responding to it, a matter of the reciprocal action upon each other of environment and organism. So it is with man and his social environment. There are forces in man, if frail in comparison, as well as in the environment. The resultant in social life at any time is the outcome of the inter-action of these forces from each side. The forces of the environment are impersonal, mechanical in their action as chemical elements, without purposive direction or end. Man alone has sentient sensibility, capability of purpose, sense of "ends to be achieved." Even those sensations of his which come up into consciousness, uninitiated or unaccompanied by reason, as physical pain for instance, they also have functional "ends in view." Rising up the scale of sentient consciousness itself is functional; the power to reason, an innate disposition, is a factor in survival; knowledge itself is functional, its character is of the nature of use. "is inchoate action (action only begun, rudimentary, direct) inchoately directed to an end"; which is to say, "The Idea is essentially active." I write the above weird stuff against the persistent notion that evolution as a process has only a progressive trend and that somehow nature has an "end in view." Hegel, Bergson and the *elan vital*? Consciously or unconsciously the reasoning of my opponents is permeated with that old fashioned concept. Perhaps man is by nature animistically inclined to dramatise and scientific mechanism is alien to his spirit.

Granted, then, the permanence of the social conditions that produced an economic-social class in society, we may expect a response to those conditions among the members of that class in degree of their varying sensitiveness and vigor of innate or acquired characteristics, physical, moral and intellectual. Arguing a priori, that is, arguing from pre-existent knowledge or from prejudice or from some general principle e.g., that the response of a class to political or economic oppression will be to throw it off—arguing so, is no guarantee of the result. It may be they may attempt and fail, or it may be that subservience and abject submission will be the line of response. A priori (J. H. B.) there is no foretelling; the given, the immediate circumstances will determine the outcome; the resultant as we examine it at any particular date, now or in the future, is the outcome of the play of the whole complex of factors engaged at any such date.

My critic in last issue, J. H. B., says that the revolutionary movement must prove equal to its task or history is falsified (emphasis mine). O Rome, O

Nineveh, "I passed by the walls of Balclutha and they were desolate!" Life never falsifies history; it is the material of history. The history books and men's interpretations of history—why, that is another story. Those may be falsified if we take them to be more than expedient guides in a world whose essence is, not uniform repetition but infinite variability. That is why I reason that we should cultivate an experimental attitude on the future and not that of a fixed routine. Should a biological-social history of bees ever be written, aeons of time, I suppose, would register few changes of social structure based on subdivision of labor. Hundreds of thousands of years of social stability might supervene between changes of structure during which there would be nothing to record of historical significance so far as the social development of the race was concerned; merely the commonplace round of things, vital statistics, births, marriages and deaths, etc. would interest an annalist only. Thus historical generalizations could be drawn exactly depicting over immense periods both the past and the future. But in two hundred years man has transformed his world, transformed both his material culture in ways and means of life and; allowing for some lag, his immaterial, spiritual culture also. "Other times other manners."

This transformed world has its own particular problems. Things are not going well in this modern world. Among its problems is what is to become of a new social class that has appeared, restless, discontented. There is a bitter competitive life between individuals, between classes, between the national entities; concurrently there exists a condition of world-wide mutual dependence due to an interlocking system of economic relations such as calls for a pooling of the world's resources in the common interest. The latter condition is the result of a change in the state of the industrial arts; the former is a condition of life which suited a state of the industrial arts now passed away, that of the small self-sustaining economy of the localities of the pre-machine age and the individual production of the handicraftsman. The social problem appears as one of maladjustment. To the student of society the state of the industrial arts, the material productive culture, underlies and conditions all the rest of the cultural features. Maladjustment occurs in degree as the rest of culture lags behind the former. Are the social evils of international war arising out of the industrial and commercial rivalries of the great vested interests, and the poverty, insecurity and deprivations of life of the underlying populations due to the principle of private ownership in-so-far as it relates to social means of production? Then the legal and political institutions which support and enforce that principle need changing to rectify the maladjustment, for, lagging behind human needs they are unable to function for a healthy social life. Institutions are the organs of the body politic, as the heart, lungs, etc., are to the human body.

But the seat of the problem lies deeper yet; institutions are secondary effects in the chain of causation. The prestige of the law and the military power of the State rest finally and find ultimate sanction in the opinion of the community. Whatever of force and fraud may have established those institutions in their inception; or however the force of tradition, or the inertia of settled habits and ways of thought, or lack of education may continue to maintain them through retarding advance to a more enlightened opinion; behind the institutional lag lies the lag of opinion. In this age of universal political enfranchisement in the advanced nations the institutions are representative, and not even bourgeois legal theory claims for them any other basis, either of divine or other kinds of right. The idea is essentially active, knowledge is functional. To spread knowledge, to create opinion, to organize ways and means through which opinion may become effective in a civilized way is the work of those who

wish to take up the lag and remove social evils.

Whether control is seized by violence or by legal means, both must alike have the massed opinion of the community in support of the social programme. Particularly is this so in advanced communities, where a universal literacy and an active political enfranchisement have obtained for generations, and, as a consequence, where opinion is an active principle. "Violence passes, but the law abides," said a Frenchman of Mussolini. Which is to say that, after all, Mussolini is not absolute dictator; he must trim his sails to the winds of opinion or he has but a short time to strut the stage of political life. Subsequent enquiries continue to show that behind the spectacular military seizure of political power in Italy Mussolini had with him a great majority opinion in that country, in the sense that he gave voice to ideas and a practical programme to which that majority at least had no strenuous objection, or the revolutionary workers would have countered Fascism with more success.

"To assume that the transformation from the last form of slavery to freedom will come merely as the result of slow changes in social viewpoints and patchwork reforms secured by or granted to the slaves by the masters appears to be as visionary and unpractical a state of mind to me as does revolution by force to C." says J. H. B. I did not use the term "slow" in connection with social changes so far as I am aware. I said the process was one of "gradualism" and history bears out the truth of that descriptive term for the past, while the years since Saint Simon down through Robert Owen and Marx bear tribute to the ideological preparation that necessarily precedes great social changes. Since the Laissez-faire school dominated social theory approximately at the beginning of the same period, and to whom social reform was anathema, it has been an age of experimental social reform, as for instance, in social hygiene, in the nature of factory legislation, shortening of working hours, reduction of child labor, the establishment of hospitals and public clinics, public parks and playgrounds, etc. Great educational systems and public libraries have been established, successive extensions of the franchise have taken place and the anti-combination laws against trades unions abolished. During this time the centralized state, that mere policeman of the Laissez-faire school, has taken to itself more and more of social powers. More and more, contrary to its own will and against the theory of self-help and individual enterprise, the state is concerning itself with the community as a whole as a going concern. State socialism, state capitalism, which you will, a rose by any other name will smell as sweet—or stab your finger. Further, who can estimate the contributions of science to this ferment; in anthropology from Lewis H. Morgan down, in economic and political theory, in history, in social psychology and the rest of them. It has, in fact, been an age of a vast preoccupation with the social question, an age of preparation for greater adventure in social experiment.

Has all this been the work of masters and slaves? Bah, let us not make a perverted use of words in seriousness. Push the class struggle with all vigor, but in a civilized way. Patchwork reforms? Is an anaemic working class, stunted physically and mentally, and morally degraded, a likely instrumentality for transforming the world? Is not a strong, vigorous, self-reliant, intelligent and knowledgeable working class the desirable instrument? J, at least, am sure so and say, scrutinize those reforms I have mentioned, and if the battle be to the strong and skillful see if they can not be regarded in more ways than one as preparations, if unconsciously designed ones, for the social revolution. Preparation! Leaving out palace revolutions, every political revolution with a new social purpose must have been prepared for. And power came to the modern capitalist class all