

# "The Futility of Reform."

By J. A. McDONALD.

**I**N the process of Capitalist development there are times when the social mechanism functions badly. The methods of continuing the process must be changed. The ragged ends of the system must be sandpapered and the gearing overhauled. Necessity demands the introduction of social reforms.

These reform measures are guided through state legislatures by the ruling class and, consequently, become the law of the land. Such measures are invaluable to them because they ensure the perpetuation of class rule. They serve to prolong a social form that might otherwise collapse or at least proceed in an ineffective manner.

In the long list of these reforms there is not one that affects the basis of the capitalist system. They are engineered for the purpose of mitigating some of the most baneful effects of class society. The hundreds of legal enactments placed on the statute books of every land, each year, are not formulated to effect a fundamental change in the social relationships existing today but rather to make possible the smooth development of the system that is.

While all measures so devised by the ruling class have as their objective the protection of class interests yet from the workers' standpoint no favorable change has been registered. This is palpable when we examine the history of those countries where reform legislation has made the greatest headway.

Britain and Germany are two shining examples in this connection. The numerous legislative changes of the past century have assisted the rulers of both nations to accomplish much. But looking over the field from a worker's standpoint we fail to find a trace of any material gain.

One has only to scan the pages of Chiozza Money's "Riches and Poverty," or the "Decay of Capitalist Civilization," by Sidney and Beatrice Webb to understand how reform legislation has affected the workers of Britain. The political speeches of the last election campaign could be read to the same purpose.

Every party in the field had to admit the gravity of the situation. Usually the party in power paints in rosy colors the picture of social conditions, while those in opposition portray affairs in shady lines. But on this occasion the Baldwin Government was seeking a change from free trade to protection and, in order to establish the validity of their claim, they were forced to show how ineffectual the old methods had been. Unemployment, poverty, slavery were on the increase and every politician agreed.

With such facts at our disposal why should we of the working class continue to fight for reforms that

tenderness for sinners. If we wish to turn back, let us turn back to Tertullian, who pictured hell as a sort of peep show for the saved, guaranteed to furnish unfailing entertainment to the fortunate inhabitants of paradise, which—but his own vigorous style in the treatise "De Spectaculis" will give a more vivid picture:

"How shall I wonder! How shall I laugh! How shall I rejoice! How shall I triumph when I behold so many and such illustrious kings groaning with Jupiter their god in the lowest darkness of hell! Then shall the tragedians pour forth in their own misfortune more piteous cries than those with which they had made the theatre to resound, while the comedian's powers shall be better seen as he becomes more flexible by the heat. Compared with such spectacles, with such subjects of triumph as these what can praetor or consul, quaestor or pontiff, afford! And even now faith can bring them near, imagination can depict them as present."

To Tertullian eternity did not seem too long a

cannot assist us! Cannot the history of the older countries be taken as a guide by us of this continent? I think so. And it was in the light of such perspective that the founders of the Socialist Party Canada adopted the attitude they did. They were able to visualise the futility of reforms. They understood that nothing less than a social revolution would suffice to remedy social conditions.

While seeing that a reform movement was detrimental to working class welfare, they did not adopt an attitude of hostility to each individual measure. The idiocy of such a contention should be obvious to any one of normal intelligence. Every reform does not necessarily militate against our interests as a class. An extension of the franchise, or of the educational system, for instance, could not be construed as being detrimental to us. When such measures are introduced by our masters we can make what use of them we may. But it must be realised that the innovation emanated from social necessity on their part. It was their business to patch up the system in the best way they knew how and because the measures I have mentioned assisted them in this respect is no reason why we should detour to wage a special war upon what we can utilise for our own purpose.

The chief aim of capitalist reformers is to salve the worst sores of modern society so as to prolong the system of exploitation, and increase the surplus values extracted from the workers. They always insist, however, that they are animated only by a desire to benefit all sections of the body politic even to those whom they exploit. The results give the lie to such a statement.

Nothing of a drastic or revolutionary nature can be expected in the way of social legislation so long as capitalism lasts. The ruling class will introduce nothing that interferes with its right to rule and exploit. Every act placed on the statute books finds its way there because of its utility to the world's owners.

So long as a working class organisation remains a minority in a legislative body it cannot turn its own desires into law. Those who dominate will not allow it. The inclination may be there to do great things but the conditions are against it. As Labriola has well stated—"The economic system is not a tissue of reasoning but it is a sum and a complex of facts which engenders a complex tissue of relations. It is a foolish thing to assume that this system of facts which the ruling class has established with great pains through the centuries by violence, by sagacity, by talent and by science will confess itself vanquished, will destroy itself to give way to the demands of the poor and to the reasoning of their advocates. How demand the suppression of poverty without demanding the overthrow of all the

time in which to make up for the kindness and forbearance demanded of him on earth.—The Nation (N. Y.)

## HERE AND NOW.

Reading the business journals, we learn that this being the year of the U. S. Presidential election and that event being almost over and done with, we may expect money to loosen up to such an extent that the business which is likely to make the greatest stride in prosperity will be the adding machine manufacturing business. These machines, it seems, are guaranteed to last but four years.

About the only use we have just now for an adding machine is to add up our losses. We're in favor of a president who will make losses impossible, so we're not voting this election.

However, where there's life there's hope, they say—but that's nothing to boast about. Neither are

rest! To demand of this society that it shall change its law which constitutes its defense is to demand an absurd thing. The partisans of critical communism recognised that history has the right to follow its course. The bourgeois phase can be outgrown and it will be. But as long as it exists it has its laws. The relativity of these exists in the fact that they grow and develop in certain determined conditions, but their relativity is not simply the opposite of necessity, a mere appearance, a soap bubble. These laws may disappear and they will disappear by the very fact of the change of society, but they do not yield to the arbitrary suggestion which demands a change, proclaims a reform, or formulates a program." (Essays on the Mat. Con. of Hist. pages 83 and 84.)

An organisation that places the advocacy of reforms on its program must of necessity confuse the minds of the workers. It makes it appear to them as though capitalism could solve its own contradictions, and assure every unit in society better conditions than now obtains if only the social machinery is properly oiled and attended. It causes the worker to tinker with each little defect in the system instead of using his energy to change the foundation. It stimulates confusion and retards progress.

In view of these facts the wisdom of the Party founders can scarcely be questioned. They dealt with realities and fashioned their program accordingly. The position they adopted was in harmony with the teachings of Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto. This textbook was not meant to apply exclusively to the year 1848. It was an explanation of capitalist society, and even though some words and phrases might become obsolete, or require to be changed, yet by and large it suffices as well today as it did when written.

But now, the S. P. of C. has decided to plow a new furrow. It was not done on the spur of the moment. More than two years ago I predicted the coming change. The verification of a prediction does not necessarily prove the truth of the hypothesis that led to the prediction. But in this case I think it does. It did not require special ingenuity to note the development of the present attitude.

If the issue were placed before the Party membership for a decision there would probably be some value in a continuation of my contributions. But under the present circumstances they can have little effect. The deed is done. The Party has decided to go the new way. A clear cut revolutionary program has given way to a more popular demand. I have stated my position in regard to the change. I have done my utmost to portray its fallacy. But all to no avail. The will of the Party is otherwise. Its decision is final. Time—the mighty arbiter—will solve the problem.

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