

Socialist Influence

On

Social Progress

MAURICE SPECTOR

About election time when the politicians are clamoring for the vote of the free and enlightened citizen who in spite of his amazing privileges, such as the permission to sell his labor power when there is a demand for it, to travel freely if he has the means, to starve unhindered if done quietly and decently, to go to war when called upon by the masters of the state, still feels disquieted over sundry matters; about this time, we repeat, the free and much "lightened" citizen begins to seek ways and means of bettering the condition of the country. Being somewhat of a social reformer, philanthropist and independent all in one, he had voted alternately for the great political parties Tweedledum and Tweedledee, always in the hope that the party that had just been "out" would be a much sadder and wiser party when it would be returned to power. But it must sorrowfully be admitted that our enlightened citizen had always been regularly and monotonously disappointed but not disillusioned. Whenever it was suggested, however, that he should give his vote to the Socialist, he would observe with profound political sagacity that there were two objections to such a policy. In the first place, no matter how comprehensive the Socialist platform be, it is yet extreme and ignores the fact that human nature changes but slowly if it changes at all; secondly, the need for just and efficient administration and legislation is immediate. Thus a vote for the Socialist is a vote wasted, as in most cases it is improbable that he will be elected. So vote instead for the good and honest candidate of Tweedledum or Tweedledee—who stands a more certain chance of being elected, and who will thus be enabled to secure good legislation earlier.

Such an attitude, incredibly shortsighted and stupid tho' it be, is undoubtedly present among great numbers of otherwise intelligent people. So after heartily condemning the stupidity of their reasoning, let us calmly enquire whether the facts of the case really warrant the assertion that a vote for a Socialist is ever wasted—granting even that the Socialist is unsuccessful in his efforts at election. We shall, in this present article, only deal with this matter and leave the question of extremeness and human nature for a second occasion.

A great part of this attitude towards the Socialist party is caused by the knowledge of the strength of the older existing political parties. These parties, which may have stood for something vital in the past, which may have (satisfied) certain political and social demands a very long time back, having by reason of the progress of history with its involved changes in political and social life, lost their once vital significance, act no longer as anything but a burden in the way of modern movements grappling with the problems of modern society. These historical parties have retained their power only by means of that strong and often lamentable influence—tradition, combined with a limited amount of adaptability to changed times. Families have inherited their policies as they have inherited their property and religion. Entrenched in political privilege, the Republicans and Democrats of the United States, the Liberals and Conservatives of Canada, tho' having origins

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due to far different causes than are at work at present, still govern the country and hinder social progress.

But, it may be objected, the generalization that the older political parties are so much "live lumber," is too wide. Behold, for instance, the apparently distinct line of cleavage between the Liberal and Conservative parties in Britain. The Liberals are pushing forward radical and reform legislation, whereas the Tories are the embodiment of cautious re-actionism. The question for us here is whether the Liberals became so liberal because of their own desires, or whether there was some outside force which threateningly compelled them to follow the course they have.

Whoever has studied the origins of the British political parties knows that they never were conceived in the idea of democracy in the question of the rights of the people. The Whigs and the Tories originated over a division as to which of two rival royal dynasties should be supported. Soon each party had a set of traditions and a line of policy peculiar to itself. Gradually certain social classes identified themselves with one or the other party—the land-owning classes with the Tories, the mercantile classes with the Whigs. The plans and policies of each party were dictated by the most prominent family group or "compact" in the party. In the main the British proletariat was as yet uneducated, class-unconscious, and received its ideology from one or the other of the ruling classes. Thus its influence was almost nil.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, not only did the structure of the world of industry change, but the spirit of the proletariat, too, underwent a profound reformation—and under the pressure of the merciless exploitation which was then prevalent, the proletariat was aroused to a sense of its subjection and to the need of a working-class solidarity. Then came a real expression of the historical class-struggle—the organization of unions. The older political parties had meanwhile been terrorized by this startling Renaissance of the demos (it is amusing to read the doleful lamentations of the clergy over the "increasing irreverence" of the workers, and the bitter denunciations of the journalist henchmen of the governing classes); and began to seek for the means to control or pacify this growing menace to their security.

But an even more important result of the new conditions created by the Industrial Revolution, was the appearance and development of modern Socialism with its clear-cut ways of criticism, its keen and accurate analysis of capitalist society, and its definite proposals of remedy. The Socialist propaganda found a fruitful soil among the working-class. The governing classes were thus faced with a perplexing alternative—either they could ignore the spirit of proletariat discontent and invite a catastrophe, or adopt a conciliatory attitude, which would at least temporarily check the storm of social protest. Neither by reason of their own intellectual enlightenment, nor by reason of their love of abstract justice, nor by reason of their Christian ethics, have the Liberal or Conservative, the Republican or Democrat, ever passed radical social legislation—only through their fear of what they term, the "Red Spectre," through their fear of the success of the Socialist appeal, through their fear of retaining

nothing by ceding nothing, have they introduced any reform. What has done most to alleviate the lot of the working-class, is not innate affability of the aristocratic or middle classes, but the standing threat of a Socialist victory.

For this reason it does not always appear necessary for the Socialist to emphasize the reformist part of his platform. He knows that by steadfastly striving to realize the ultimate aims of Socialism, he will compel the possessing classes in self-defence, to pass social legislation, the demand for which would be ignored if it came from the good-hearted social reformer. A careful examination of the social legislation of the last ten years will show still more clearly this extraordinary potential influence which Socialist propaganda exercises on social progress. The various Compensation Acts, Insurance Acts, old age pension systems, which are the boast of German, British and French reform legislators, have been proposed as palliatives on the Socialist platform ever since the days of Ferdinand Lasalle. An interesting bit of history, for example, is involved in the passing of the first workmen's aid legislation in Germany. During the brilliant period of Bismark's triumphant blood and iron policy, the German proletariat steadily refused to be led astray from the paths of domestic reform by the glittering prizes of Imperialism. Under the leadership of Lasalle they organized themselves into a class-conscious Socialist movement which threatened to destroy the German aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Bismark shrewdly divined wherein lay the trouble, and hastened to weaken the springs of the Socialist movement by himself passing a series of workmen's protective acts. He hoped by this drastic action to destroy once and for all the *raison d'être* of Socialism in Germany. That he failed is due to the fact that he neutralized this political stroke by a blundering use of force to aid in throttling the Socialist party. The latter means of attack had, fortunately, just the opposite effect from that which Bismark had wished for.

The influence of Socialism is pervading all social life and all intellectual life. When new parties are formed they looked to the Socialist platform to give them the issues for a campaign (witness the deceased Progressive Party in the United States). We have succeeded in familiarizing the world with the concepts "class-struggle, class-consciousness," "social revolution," and other phrases that sum up our philosophy of history.

We are urging on society a practical realization of ideals based on reality. We wage war against British "virtueism" and gushy American "idealism" as much as against German militarism. Humanitarian cults, Christian fraternities, social reform bodies, etc., can never accomplish anything unless they are supported by the organized strength of Socialist propaganda—with the organized strength of millions of workingmen behind it.

Socialism has not had to wait till the day of realization in toto in order to influence social progress. It has been an active factor in modifying the course of history for a long time without actually ever having been in power.

Peace "Proposals."

The Daily Telegraph (London, Eng.), discussing "Peace Talk," says that:—"Peace will come within sight, perhaps, when France is cleared of the foe, Bulgaria knocked out of the war, and the corridor to the East closed once more both to Germany and Austria. How can it come before?"

No mention of Serbia, Belgium, or Montenegro! No mention of those "small nations whose safety must be secured." Do not we see behind this statement of the capitalist mouth-piece the underlying cause of the war—capitalist rivalry?

CLIP AND COMMENT

"If the workers of the British empire are not conscripted they will be dangerous when the war ends."—New York World.

Certainly, as the B.C. Federationist observes, that is all there is lying behind the conscription scheme, either in the British Isles and New Zealand, where it has already been put through, in Australia, where the reactionaries are now trying to put it through, and in Canada, where the same type of patriots are getting ready to spring it. No labor movement can seriously threaten in any country that possesses a military establishment based on conscription. In the face of such an establishment labor is practically powerless, and nobody knows this better than the members of the ruling class. That is why there is such a powerful move in all previously non-military countries to build up military establishments based upon enforced service. Take, for instance, the case of the United States. An energetic movement is on there to, in the name of "preparedness," convert that erstwhile peaceful and non-military nation into a blustering, and swashbuckling military power, cut upon the medieval pattern that prevails in Central Europe, and which has succeeded in throwing half the world into a blood-debauch that has no precedent of like magnitude in all history.

"All of us might be buying margarine at 12 cents a pound instead of butter at 40 cents, but for one little obstacle—namely, that Parliament has prohibited the use of margarine. No substitute for butter can be legally imported or sold in Canada. Yet we don't even make enough butter in Canada to keep ourselves going. Canada imported a million dollars worth of butter last year than she exported. Why does Parliament prohibit margarine? Why as a sop to our dairy interests. If Canadians want food prices down one good point to start at would apparently be to abolish the prohibition of margarine."—Ottawa Journal.

Not by the importation of substitutes to take places of the genuine article will the cost of living be kept from soaring but by the means of life (including the dairy interests) belonging to the people and run for use and not for profit, instead of our present system of private ownership.

"The solution—it is a hard saying no doubt—is not to pretend that you can rationalize patriotism as a principle, but to undertake to guide patriotism already existing in some degree, visibly or invisibly, in every child, so as to make it, instead of a clamorous and provocative thing, a thing of good repute, fair and honorable, and a rule of life and (if need be) of death for every man. This is to leave untouched and unexplained the central mystery of patriotism, which, indeed, can scarcely be handled without being defiled, but to be careful to suggest and encourage the workings of the spirit in countless acts in the past and the present. 'Do not be afraid,' we would say, 'of making a mystical appeal. Do not be afraid of affirming the existence of patriotism while you cannot profess to analyze it.'—Quoted from "Spectator" by "Canadian Defence."

Does the advice of the inspired mystic need our comment? Usually, being rather materialistic, we like the tangible things of life, and certainly when it comes to the sacrifice of human life we feel some need to "rationalize" the principle.

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