

# Professor Leacock's Socialism

By C. K.

WE must confess at the outset to being more than a little out of patience with Mr. Leacock. We were of the opinion that in his last week's article he had displayed just about as much ignorance of Socialism, and, indeed, of Sociology in general, as one man could possibly contain within himself, and still hang together. We half expected that his criticism of Bellamy's "Looking Backward," scheduled to appear in the "Daily Province," of Oct 4, would be such as we should find no great occasion to attack. Inasmuch as we have consistently and persistently pointed out that such Utopias as the one Bellamy describes in his book are by no means to be taken as representing modern Scientific Socialism, we would not have been in the least put out if Professor Leacock had knocked it as flat as a pancake. And had it been done scientifically—as it easily could have been by anyone possessing any real knowledge of the matters involved—we would even have been pleased.

But what do we find on perusing Mr. Leacock's chapter six, in which he essays to demolish Bellamy's ideal commonwealth? We find that far from attacking it scientifically and demolishing completely—so far as its sociological value is concerned—he has signally failed to demolish it at all. The arguments he advances against it are so feeble, so obviously inadequate, that his whole attack upon it amounts in effect to an endorsation.

He says, for instance, regarding the structure of Bellamy's Commonwealth; "Can such a thing, or anything conceived in its likeness, possibly work? The answer is and must be absolutely and emphatically no." Brave words, my masters. We are tempted to suggest to Mr. Leacock that it is only the "little learning" which would dare to be so positive on such a question. As a matter of fact, Mr. Leacock misses the point entirely. Our-selves, we are inclined to think that such a system as Bellamy describes would work. So far as our knowledge and experience extends, we know of no reason why it should not work, **providing society could be organized in such a system.** And therein—in those last ten words—lies the point that, apparently, has completely escaped Mr. Leacock. The point is that society does not permit itself to be organized, according to anybody's plan—Edward Bellamy's or Professor Leacock's or anybody else's. Economic systems are a matter of growth and development and they can grow and develop at no faster pace than the intellectual development of society and other material conditions permit. "Man does not make his history out of the whole cloth but out of such materials as he finds ready to hand" (Marx.) That, in brief, is the argument which effectually puts Bellamy's "Looking Backward" completely out of the running so far as any sociological value is concerned.

But the whole of Mr. Leacock's objections to it may be summed up in that phrase which seems to have become a habit with him—"It won't work." Let us see, then, why, according to Mr. Leacock, it won't work. If he were concerned only with reaching and stating his conclusion in the fewest possible words we have no doubt as to what it would be. "It won't work because it is Socialism—so there!" We can almost imagine we hear him saying it—and stamping his foot to give it emphasis. But when one is writing for the capitalist press, one is under the necessity of filling a certain amount of "space" if one expects the agreed upon remuneration. So Mr. Leacock must need take several tentative bites at the cherry. It would not do for him to prove the unworkableness of Bellamy's commonwealth in so brief and, to him we may be sure, so agreeable a manner. That would result in a shrinkage of the pay check

which would be most disconcerting. So he must needs go at it in a more roundabout and diffuse manner—which he does for about two whole columns.

And the gist of it all is that Bellamy's system would not work because it relies upon elected officials for its administration. And elected officials are dishonest, they are biased, they are incompetent, they are corrupt. They are so now and consequently they would be under Bellamy's system. Truly a wonderful argument, an argument worthy of—shall we say of a Leacock? The good professor has admitted in a former chapter the principle that a change in the methods of production and distribution of wealth causes a corresponding change in the form and nature of social institutions and a change in men's ideas. Now the commonwealth of Edward Bellamy, which Mr. Leacock is criticizing is a state of society in which a change in the methods of production and distribution is assumed to have taken place. Consequently, those material conditions which now environ society, which encourage the election of incompetents to administrative office, which cause them to be biased in their judgment, which lure them, nay often drive them to corrupt practices—those very conditions also are necessarily assumed to be absent. Notice that word "assumed." Therein lies the whole point. In Bellamy's book, certain changes are assumed to have taken place. That is the premise upon which Bellamy very skillfully and very logically, it must be admitted, built his whole edifice. Mr. Leacock, never thinking to question this premise, which is obviously the most questionable part of the whole business, proceeds to attack Bellamy's very skillfully and logically built superstructure. And the arguments which he advances against it are so timeworn, so threadbare, as to hardly be worth anyone's time nowadays to rebut. As a matter of fact, there is not one of Mr. Leacock's arguments which Bellamy does not anticipate and effectually dispose of in the very book which Mr. Leacock is criticizing. Anyone reading both Bellamy's "Looking Backward," and Mr. Leacock's criticism of it, can not escape the suspicion that Mr. Leacock is weak in the head.

As a matter of fact, however, we are not—nor need any Socialist be—greatly concerned in defending Bellamy's book against the onslaughts of Mr. Leacock. As we have already stated "Looking Backward" does not in any way represent modern Scientific-Socialism. It is a description of a Utopia—a very desirable Utopia some think. Others are not so sure—and as such has nothing whatever to do with modern Socialism. We are concerned, however, as Socialists, with Professor Leacock as a critic of Socialism, and a writer on social problems. We are concerned with his qualifications for the office. And we do not find them to be such as fit him for his self-imposed task. Not only is he apparently quite ignorant of what modern Socialism really is, but he has proved himself quite unable to effectively discredit that peculiar hotch-potch of befuddled nonsense which he imagines to be Socialism. He is in the position of a man who is unable to knock down the dummy which he himself has set up. What kind of "delusion of grandeur" is this that Mr. Leacock suffers from, that he should imagine himself fitted to discourse publicly on social problems in such critical times as these.

There is, however, one point, to which Mr. Leacock takes frequent occasion to refer, upon which we are, to a certain extent, completely at one with him. We have reference to the impending danger of social chaos. We also fear this. But we believe, indeed we are confident, that it can be

averted by the dissemination of knowledge; knowledge of the laws of social development, knowledge of the basic defects in the present social structure, and the commonsense use of that knowledge. Mr. Leacock apparently believes that it can be averted by ignoring the present critical state of affairs, by being thankful that the capitalist machine "in its own poor clumsy fashion does work," and, above all, by setting our faces resolutely against any suggestion of "State ownership of Public Utilities."

It is not our function to advocate "State" ownership. We know, if Professor Leacock does not, that such is not Socialism. But we know, also, that there are certain "Vested Interests" which are very much afraid of State Ownership. And while we are not prepared to state that Mr. Leacock is being paid by them to write what he has written, we are of the opinion that, if Mr. Leacock had not written as he has, it would have been necessary for those same Vested Interests to have employed some literary prostitute to write very much as Mr. Leacock has written.

Summing up the whole of his chapters on the "Unsolved Riddle" to date, we are not at all impressed by the amount of real knowledge Mr. Leacock has displayed. He is, we understand, a professor of economics. If his remarks on economics throughout his series are to be taken as typical of what he believes and teaches, then all we can say is that he is either woefully ignorant or absurdly biased. There is not one of the perplexities which baffle him in this field which can not be solved by the application of the Marxian theory. But Mr. Leacock, apparently, has never heard of any such theory, or if he has, he keeps the knowledge locked tight within his breast. His knowledge of the laws of social development appears to be practically nil. Once in a while, it is true, he happens, as if by accident, to stumble upon the correct answer to some minor question, but, generally speaking, he just muddles along in a more or less aimless fashion.

As we have previously remarked, Mr. Leacock is better known to us as a humorist than as a sociologist. He has written not a few very funny stories. But we doubt if he will ever write anything more quaintly humorous, more infinitely ridiculous than "The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice." C. K.

## INDIA UNDER BRITISH RULE.

The press reported that the Viceroy's Council of India had carried with enthusiasm an address of loyal devotion to the King. At the same sitting, sixty questions were asked by the Indian members regarding the Government's oppression in the Punjab. In the replies it was stated that in connection with the riots, 852 persons were tried, 103 sentenced to death, 265 transported for life, 104 sentenced to prison for terms of over three years, and 365 to forfeiture of property. As a consequence of pressure from Mr. Montagu, the executions were limited to 18, 488 sentences were reduced, and 332 forfeitures remitted. A young Indian University student who drew my attention to this news exclaimed, "There you see only the cold figures, but underneath them, to us who know, there lie the names of our best educated and most revered leaders, the very brain and heart of the movement for Indian freedom." In last week's India I notice that a list is given of newspapers suppressed in India between March 1 and July 14 of this year. The list is headed "The Daily Sup-press," as well it might be. During that period action was taken against 53 journals—that is one every two days.—Labor Leader, London.