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By the Way

It is an axiom of political economy that all true political representation must be and can only be based on definite economic interests.—Marx.

Before 1914, we doctrinaire socialists and educationalists were often asked to forecast a detailed plan as to ways and means that would be adopted in the transition period for turning the means of production and distribution into communally controlled enterprises. How will the job of establishing "production for use" be worked out? asked practically-minded workers who, sensible that the present state of things was fundamentally wrong and attracted by the socialist ideal, yet were, by native bent of mind, naturally desirous of some information on the intermediate steps to the ideal. Such minds are in the majority, perhaps fortunately so, and do not easily succumb to an ideal unless some more or less practical ways and means of realizing it accompany its advocacy. Perhaps our questioners ideas on ways and means of change run somewhat to this effect: Production for use evidently means that private ownership of industrial plants is done away with and that all activity in both the distributive and productive spheres is to be carried on on the principles of co-operation and democratic control.

If the competitive market is done away with, by what means are values set and the rewards of industry established? If by the hour, if, for instance, five hours of labor in a mine will be rewarded with a sack of flour which had taken five hours to produce, what is to prevent the miners indulging in a form of profiteering by slacking, working at low intensity, or being unprogressive in introducing new methods and inventions into the industry, thus falling behind the standard of productivity set up by the millers? Do the miners control the mining industry, appointing the managers, technical staffs, bosses, etc., setting the exchange values or prices of the product and the hours and conditions of work? If so, what protection has the general community against this monopoly by a group? On the other hand, if the community controls the industry, what protection have the miners against the vague interest and lack of knowledge of mining and mining conditions which must unavoidably prevail among the mass of consumers remote in distance and with other preoccupations, interests and habits of life? Or, again, questions might run to this effect: is it possible that in a system of "production for use" that the principle of competition may be retained in some controlled form as stimulus to activity, that is, a free trading market and price fixing in some such fashion as prevailed in medieval times when the Guild system prevailed? In those times each craft was organized in a guild which regulated prices, quality of goods, hours of work, and kept a general supervision over the working activity of the individual craftsman in the interest of the whole craft. At the distributive end were merchants and traders' guilds, functioning to a like purpose. Is it possible that in the future the general body of the consumers might create co-operative consumers' organizations functioning to a similar end as the traders' Guilds? How shall varied individual tastes and preferences find themselves effective demands, and desires and appreciations be stimulated and elevated as they must if it is to be a progressive society? Will there be left room in this society for individual

enterprise and initiative to energize by its competitive stimulus the lumbering-non-competitive mass of economic activity? Can such individual enterprise be controlled in the interest of the community, retaining its advantages while checking profiteering tendencies? Is it not always individuals who break new ground in all the arts of life, and generally doing so contrary to the immediate felt interests and will of the herd? Will the future be one where it is realized that man is an individual personality as well as a unit in an economic machine?

Some such ideas as those I have formulated lay back of the innumerable questions as to ways and means of organizing economic activities and relations in the transition period. We, however, declined to satisfy the enquirers, contenting ourselves with the broad definition of the future society at the far end of the transition period as one in which social ownership of the means of productive life prevailed. Since then, much water has run under the bridge, the issue of social change has been forced to the front beyond denial. There is Russia; there is Great Britain where a Labor Party is expected to succeed to the powers of the state and there are other countries, as for instance, Italy, in which country they are entering into an experiment for a controlled capitalism along syndicalist lines. Italy is a country of small bourgeoisie, of peasantry in various states of affluence and of proletarian wage workers. Neither "big business" interests, nor the landed aristocracy are powerful. The latter class have but little influence and a diminishing one at that. The experiment may be worth attention. As the problems of transition loom up, it seems to me that large generalizations descriptive of an ideal state at the further end of a process of transition to be yet undergone, no longer meet the present need. The objective in which the process is intended to end must be kept in mind so that the intermediate steps may have guidance, but the need is for information, understanding and criticism of proposed measures and programs considered from the standpoint of the process of transition. There should be prediction of consequences arising out of their application, as they might bear on working class well-being and progress, or effect legal and institutional changes one way or another. It no longer suffices to say that this or that measure is not socialism or that it will not bring socialism, as though we subscribed to the possibility of wholesale change.

The working classes in Europe are working out a clearer understanding of their position in Society. Singling themselves out as an economic-social class and creating their own class instrumentalities, their influence on state policies increases. That class orientation is fundamental in politics—that far, in that degree, having arrived at the stage of creating its own political instruments, class consciousness, is in the stage of young life, the rest is nurture and growth, an acquiring of the wisdoms, ways, habits, dispositions and skills that are necessary to the achievements and practice of a co-operative and democratically controlled social life. The realizing of that future depends on more than merely acquiring ideas, it is also one of character, one of psychology of habit and disposition, if you will. We shall realize that society will approach the ideal as we become fitted for it. Education is a solvent of old habits, and

gives new direction to dispositions, but the practice of life and its ways is the fundamental discipline in the formation of character. As a revulsion against the competitive life of capitalism our thinking may turn to the idea that a co-operative life would be superior to the former, but character follows ideas, it changes slower. History is full of the wrecks of "New Harmonys" because human nature ran athwart fanciful ideals. There are limits to what human nature can stand; it may revolt, it may break down. To the camel its load.

The "perfectionists," seizing upon whatever truth there is in that, ask us to stay all action till we are fitted:—says one group, "you must change human nature first," and another, "the workers must first be socialists;" and another, "until the system collapses we can do nothing." Their prototype is Joshua of old, who commanded "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon."

Let me say to them that we shall never get socialism if we wait till we are fitted for it, but yet, on the other hand, we can not wait until we are fitted for it. The urgencies of life throw humanity, the perfectionists included, in between the horns of that dilemma. Men act anyway, must act with such wisdom as they may. You may question the wisdom. But take comfort from my significant quotation at the head of this article in regard to the working class. Entering into political life as a definite economic-social group, they will grow in stature in the school of experience. " . . . thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs, And the thoughts of men are widened with the passing of the suns."

To illustrate my point further: We might say to the one-idea "perfectionists"—are we fitted for political democracy? Look at the corruption and charlatany in politics! What percentage of the population are interested to exercise their franchise? What percentage of the millions who cast their vote for this or that party, this or that measure, have an intelligent understanding of what they are giving a mandate for? Is it not well enough known that a mere sporting interest is the chief interest with many in the results? Certainly we all realize that we are far from "perfectionism" in this phase of life. Yet the remedy is not to go back to the absolute monarch again to be children in leading strings, not even to a benevolent despotism, for they are the most vicious of all in undermining the spirit of liberty and self-dependence. The struggle of this age is away from both political and economic absolutism to the self-government of peoples. And it is only by practice in the arts of self-government that they can learn to use them, by experiencing the evils of licence learn to appreciate liberty, by learning to use past experience so that the consequences of future acts may be better and not worse. So it is by experiencing the evils that arise from our mishandling of the instrumentalities of political democracy that we shall acquire wisdom, growth of stature to cope with the problems of industrial democracy.

It is the fashion among many who, it seems to me, do not sense that social development has in it the characteristics of organic growth, to sneer at political democracy because it has not proved a universal panacea for social ills. True enough it has its inherent limitations. But these should

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