

The Burning Bush

COM. "C" invites us to hit the sawdust trail and be good—which is the natural habit of the reformed. But the "grace" has not come upon us. While the main issue—the tactics of socialist progress—is still with us, obdurate as ever. To which "C" has plausibly tacked on the identity of his reformism with Marxism. And asks us to show "our colors." Well, on the principle that fools may go where angels baulk, we are not disposed to shirk the issue. Nor waste time on the ragged ends.

We agree with those quotations from the Manifesto—offered to us as a *sep*. Hence, paradoxically, we agree with "C." Accordingly, we are under no necessity of "repudiating Marx" and have no glass houses to fortify. But—and we emphasise the point—those quotations are not identical with Com. "C's" original thesis—that socialism is to be accomplished by a full blooded working class, strengthened by constant improvements in living conditions, by means of reforms; by the seduction of habit; and the feasibilities of authority and human nature. That is labor politics, not proletarian identity, opportunism, not Marxism; and is therefore not in harmony with his new orientation as quoted.

Since we agree that the interest of the proletariat is one, whence came our divisions? If it does not matter which way we go, but "what we pick up on the way," why the fuss? Why not willy nilly, go with popular acclamation? Why not join the A. F. L. for instance? It claims to be the representative of labor. Why the discrimination? Are they right or wrong? Can a stiff-necked minority of reactionaries stay the progress of labor? "That's a blazing strange implication," as Jerry Cruncher might say. Why do the labor bodies never pick up socialism, or the means of socialism by the way? Why are they invariably on the service of capitalist interest? side-tracked on illusions? hedging, dallying, obscuring the fundamental issue of capitalist property right? Put it another way. Would Marx associate with Gompers and Lewis, or Moore and Draper, or British radicals, or the B. C. Federationists. Under the historic circumstances of the day, would he struggle for R. MacDonald's Russian Treaty, or the Dawes plan, or Treaty revision, or Reparations, or Liberal Land Reform, or Wheatly Housing? or similar free buns for free plugs? All of them are hailed by labor parties as beneficial to labor. The Manifesto gives its own answer—that all those things and bodies are but varying expressions of "Bourgeoisie Socialism."

With whom, then, are we to co-operate? What institutions are we to set up, or pull down? How choose and devise, amidst the conflict of aim and unidentified interest. By what standard are we to judge right and wrong? By what criterion differentiate the true interests of labor? How adopt the habits and aptitudes that lead to real Socialism from amidst the inextricable tangle of bourgeois socialism? How distinguish between true reforms and class interest? How persuade the authority of property to righteousness, and the human nature of capital from its iniquity. By one standard alone—Capitalist property in the means of life. And by one means alone—class conscious understanding of Capitalist property relations and consequence. The lack of that understanding is the one cause of labor divisions, here the understanding, is the essential of proletarian identity. Without the perception of that identity, no unity; without unity, no Socialism.

The haunting irrelevancy of the comforting axiom of picking up by the way is consequently obvious. What we pick up by the way is according to the way we go: the way we go depends on the way we see. If we see by the moonshine of revisionism, we shall dally with circian reform. If our vision is the class conscious vision of Capitalist property right, we must stand in antagonism to all who do not directly and consistently oppose that right. We can-

not co-operate with antagonistic aims. The conflict must be settled in the mind before the mind can settle the conflict in society. That is why labor never "picks up by the way." Un-classconscious, it pursues a chimera, redecorated, by the crafty skill of exigent politics, in shimmering hues of its own confusion. That is why labor is divided and broken. Its immediacy is the conservation of sectarian interest, irrespective of its proletarian implication. That is why "C" himself pleads for unity. The constant pressure of the daily struggle, with its irremediable provocation of the immediate, present socialist theory as an abstract, a romantic incursion into the future. That is why "C" emphasises the process of change, rather than the condition of change. That is the real issue between us, "C" says, the process is the thing. We say, it is time condition. The process, in virtue of its own potential, induces the means and material of change; but the ever-varying circumstance of an ever varying necessity conditions it. The process creates the impetus; the condition concatenates its form. In other words, the process is static, cosmic; the condition dynamic, vital. Hence the lag or the leap in human affairs, its tragedy or comedy—the reflex of contemporary contingencies, laden with harmonic reagents, flashing through the reason of being, in terms of the human equation.

But the Manifesto.

It was written under the revolutionary conditions of 1847. In conditions when the critical and analytic founders of Hist, Mater, expected optimistic results. As Engels points out in the preface (p. 7) some passages require modification and specifically its reforms. The conditions productive of those modifications have been enhanced since then—due either to a fall in the intelligence of the modern proletariat, compared with 1848, or a rise in the virility of governmental control, or both. Either the "aptitude" of the workers of '48 was greater than their modern brethren, or Marx was mistaken in his hope of immediate revolution. But since the conditions of development engendered less stress on the applications of reform—and have continued to do so—it would appear that Marx was led astray by that contemporary wave of reform. That is to say, that he regarded those historic turbulences of changeable reform as a proletarian understanding of the social conditions that occasioned them. Else why did he expect revolution? The same thing magnified accounts for our own magnificent wobbling. Not science.

Nevertheless, the manifesto is the substantial of Hist, Mater. And stands beyond criticism. But it affords little sanction to reformist vagaries. Naturally. Since it is the expression of scientific socialism, it can hardly express labor politics. Its real meaning, its spirit and its truth, must be read and applied by its own philosophy—the materialist conception. Over and over again it emphasises the fundamental antagonism of Capitalist property; that the function of socialism is the expression of class struggle; that no party ignoring that fundamental can be socialist; that the struggle for reform is but "practical politics,"—a side play of the Capital issue—the capture of political power, and that the organization of the proletariat for that purpose is its essential condition. Consequently, its fundamental expresses time condition, i.e., that Capital can be abolished, when, and only when, its reason of being becomes class conscious. Time-condition is not the equivalent of habit and reform; of occasion, or human nature. It is the manifest of the stage of capitalist development when class conscious perception of material interest rises superior to all the subterfuges of exigency.

Consequently, scientific socialism, recognising this, must find itself in antagonism to labor, politically entangled in the toils of trade issues. Scientific socialism calls upon the workers to muster un-

der its banner for the capture of political power—the only power there is. The only way to capture that power is to understand it. If then the workers rally instead to the support of "practical politics" it can only be because they are yet imperceptive of their identity. As political representation expresses economic interest, socialism can find its following only in the ranks of understanding. As Socialism is organized for political supremacy, it must conflict with organizations of ulterior expediencies. And, as capitalist development enforces political action, and action connotes the mind, the political color of that action must measure our social consciousness. Therefore Socialism standing on proletarian identity, must conflict with all from whatever cause, who oppose that identity. But this conflict is not against labor, but against the labor of reform (or the reform of labor); not against the proletariat, but against their borrowed organizations of bourgeois traditionalism. And while politics is the mature field of emancipation, it owes that maturity, singly, to class understanding. Outside of that understanding, the organization is just like a "milling" herd, potent, powerful, dangerous—and helpless.

Thus the appeal for co-operation is a false sentiment. It ignores the conformations of reality; and confuses political antagonism with labor reaction—a most extraordinary common idea. It puts the field of struggle in the shifty plane of opportunity. It transforms energy on inconstant vicissitudes. It seethes the kid of ignorance in the mother milk of confusion; and subsides the mind, with its magical potencies of developed faculty and material, with the reactionary visionism of a once pregnant condition.

If, as Comrade Macdonald avers, the resolve is taken, the deed done (*) then we say that at no distant date it will have to be undone. We say it not as matter of prophecy, but as statement of fact. And we say "have to," because, in the new terms of oligarchic Imperialism, it is an attempt to set back the shadow on the dial. It is an effort to force an issue, where force is futile. It strives to foster a false alliance amongst incoherent elements, forgetting, seemingly, its own materialism, that unity is of mind, and mind of circumstance, and that the verbal word quickens the mind effectively only when circumstance quickens its dispossession. A powerful and unscrupulous state, intent on its pound of flesh, on one hand, and a grovelling confusion on the other calls for another intermediary than a hybrid of "class conscious reformism!" Just as the petty bourgeoisie strove in vain against its destruction; so petty labor, its descendant, strives unavailingly for its sectarian interests. The continuous process of social degradation merges both in proletarian unity, and straight Socialism can alone point the remedy and show the way out. In spite of hope and appearance, the mixing of aims and issues, and the spreading of terms, can avail nothing against the power of the State, nor advance confusion to Socialism. It cannot be stolen; it must be thought. The true appeal is the class struggle. The real issue Capitalist property—undiluted.

Hence we agree with proletarian unity and its common identity. But we still disagree with "C's" full blooded braves, skipping the whirlpool of revolution on the stepping stones of improved conditions. And it isn't Marxian. The whole trend of Marx proves progressive social degradation. Its inevitability in fact. Explicit and implicit it is scattered throughout "Capital," e.g., "machinery and industry," "the general laws of accumulation," and

(*) Editor's Note: If we manage to outlive the argument, dear "R," when the battle is over we'll be able to write letters to one another asking where the human factor—in readers and party members—has escaped to.

Meanwhile, no resolve has been taken, and no deed has been done. That needs—at least a quorum.

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