

Just a Few Definitions.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—In a letter accompanying the following article under the above title, Comrade McNey, who is well known to our readers, expresses himself (in part) thus:

"About a year and a half ago, at the time when the 'Clarion' was under the ban, I wrote a short article of about six hundred words, that contained part of what is in the present article, only much milder in tone, and sent it to 'The World,' Oakland, Calif. (a near-Socialist paper, at that time controlled by a group who afterwards became part of the Communist Labor Party), with the request that it be published and that some comment be made on it or discussion asked for. There was no response; the article was not published. Evidently my literary style was at fault; or it was thought better not to have any discussion on such a subject. I then wrote out another copy and sent it to 'The Proletarian,' Detroit, with the same request, but I left town soon after, and missed two or three copies, so I do not know whether they published it or not.

"It is difficult to educate the workers to understand their class position or anything else, so long as the country is full of radical papers, edited by fools, freaks, humbugs and hypocrites writing volumes and saying nothing.

"The enclosed article is something in the nature of a challenge to those freaks and humbugs to get down to bed rock, and explain what they mean, and the circulation and influence of the 'Clarion' is wide enough so that they cannot all very well ignore it. Most of them will, of course, but there may be a few who, due to ignorance, or a sincere desire to get to the bottom of the subject, may undertake to discuss it. Let us hope so. I am also aware that some of the conclusions arrived at may not meet with the approval of some scientific Socialists. Very good; they have as much right to their opinion as I have."

It will be noted that in the article itself Comrade McNey requests other "Clarion" writers to express themselves on his conclusions. We have no objection to that (provided they don't all do it at once). In our opinion definitions, as such, are the stated meanings of terms which stand to be accepted or refused. Acceptance means that thereupon the properties (so to speak) of the term commonly accepted as defined may come under discussion. Refusal means that these properties cannot be discussed until they are recognized under a commonly accepted definition. We are more interested in the thing itself than in the definition of it. At the same time it can do no harm to have the terms commonly used defined and traced, for the purposes of common understanding. Comrade McNey's classification of certain working class symptoms incidental to strike conditions as recreative and sportive are not quite in keeping with the otherwise seriously expressed context of his article. We publish this article in the hope that its various fundamental statements may be examined by our readers to the end that the many elusive phrases commonly seen in Socialist and Labor papers relative to "action" of one sort and another may be discussed and that thereupon political action may be understood. Since we are on definitions it will not be amiss to direct attention to the usefulness of any word or phrase in tracing its history or, more correctly, etymology, as for instance the word economics. A study of the roots and origin of words lends stimulus to the appreciation of their present reference, and while we are not anxious that any discussion that may follow from this article should exclusively follow that course, we would like to see avoidance of arbitrary standards. There is room for considerable discussion here, and very likely, as it arises, we shall have a word to say ourselves.

FOR some years past, it has been the privilege of the workers of the world, from time to time, to be invited to apply their economic power, to use economic action, direct action, mass action, etc., in their efforts to emancipate themselves from wage slavery. We have also been warned against having anything to do with political action, parliamentary action, etc., and have been advised to strike at the ballot box with an axe. Those invitations have been issued by all manner of persons calling themselves revolutionists, and ranging all the way from stool pigeons up to university professors. On the other hand, the more conservative and law-abiding radicals and labor leaders, warn us to have nothing to do with direct action, and advise us to be content with parliamentary action, and constitutional methods. Again, there are those who tell us that political and economic action, used together at the same time, is the only solution of the problem, these being the two wings of the same bird, and whereas if we use only one at a time we will wobble around in a circle and get nowhere, if we use both together we will be able to fly along gracefully, and peacefully, to the land of milk and honey. All of which advice may be very good as far as it goes, but when we

consider that not one of those wind-jammers has ever seen fit to give a logical definition of the terms they use, nor have made any attempt to classify the subject discussed, it is all more or less confusing. Consequently we have decided to offer a few definitions for what they are worth, and judging by the general intelligence displayed by most of the disputants, we feel perfectly qualified to deal with the subject, there is always room for one more fool in any discussion, and one more fool should always be welcome in a fool's paradise, this is our main excuse for "horning in."

We will commence with a few dictionary definitions, and finish up with a few definitions of our own.

Power—"Ability, capacity, strength, energy, faculty or energy of mind, rule or authority; capacity for action."

Action—"The function or operation of that which acts; the doing of something. State of motion, activity. Force exerted by one body on another."

Economics—"The science that investigates the conditions and laws affecting the production distribution, and consumption of wealth, or the material means of satisfying human desires."

Politics—"The science and art of government."

Government—"Act or pact of governing; exercise of authority in regulating the action of something; control; direction; rule."

Strike—This word, like many other English words, has several meanings, we are concerned here with only one.

"A strike, in the labor sense, is a stoppage of work by common agreement on the part of a body of work-people for the purpose of obtaining or resisting a change in the conditions of employment."

It will be granted that these definitions from an ordinary dictionary are fairly correct, although we might elaborate on some of them a little from a Socialist point of view. Therefore, we shall proceed with our definition of terms.

Economic power, is the power of man over nature. The power of man to force from nature in ever-increasing quantity, all things necessary to his existence. In other words labor power.

Economic action, is economic power applied to the natural resources for the purpose of producing wealth.

A strike is not an application of economic power. A strike is a refusal to act. Theoretically speaking, when a group of workers are on strike, they stand motionless with their arms folded, until their demands are granted, or until starvation and the political power of the State drives them back to work. It is true, that in reality we do perform certain acts when we are on strike, such as eating our meals when we have anything to eat, or throwing a brick at a scab occasionally, and other playful little acts of similar nature, but such acts cannot properly be classified under the heading of either economic or political action, they can more correctly be classified under the heading of sport and recreation. And as such have very little to do with either economics or politics. And furthermore, the fact that this refusal to act (this stoppage of the production of profits, temporarily), occasionally brings results, in the shape of a few reforms, is no excuse for calling it action.

Political power is the power of man over man, the power of government, coercion. The power used by a class of parasites, to force a class of slaves to produce wealth, and yield it all up to their masters. Power used for the purpose of robbery and exploitation. Consequently, the class that holds the political power, also controls all economic power and action.

Political action, on the part of the capitalists, is any action they consider necessary to maintain their position as a ruling and exploiting class.

Political action, on the part of the workers, is any action they may find necessary to overthrow the political power of the capitalist class. To establish a proletarian dictatorship, and maintain it,

until all danger of counter-revolution is past, and all the means of wealth production, now the property of the capitalist class, have been transformed into the common property of society, to be operated in the interest of the whole people. For it must be remembered, that the capture of political power by the workers, no matter whether by a majority, or a minority, does not imply the instantaneous abolition of classes. Not by any means. We may make it compulsory for all to do their share of the work, but we must be in a position to see that they continue to do it. For the class psychology, and the desire to become masters once more, will persist for a long time in the minds of the conquered parasites. Economic classes, can only be eliminated by a gradual process of assimilation and education. This may take a generation or two, and can only be accomplished under a proletarian dictatorship.

Direct Action—If this term means anything at all it means efficient action. The easiest, quickest, the most efficient, or the only way to accomplish any purpose, no matter what that purpose may be. This applies to both political and economic action. The most efficient, or the only possible, economic action, is direct action, even though indirect methods must be used. Likewise, the most efficient, or the only possible, political action, is also direct action, even though indirect methods must be used. When this is understood, the term direct action, taken by itself, has little or no meaning, it is superfluous, a confusing and unnecessary term. The kind of action very often advocated by the exponents of direct action, when it is action at all, is generally idiotic action, not direct action, and equally ridiculous is the position of those law-abiding freaks who declare themselves opposed to direct action, as defined above, for such a declaration is equal to declaring themselves opposed to all action.

While we are on the question of power and action, we might mention that economic power, is sometimes defined as "the power arising from the ownership of economic wealth," by persons who do not investigate the subject very thoroughly. This theory is a fallacy. Ownership is merely a legalized claim, and the only power connected with it is the political power that sustains it. It is true, that the ownership of economic wealth, the rights of property, give the owners, or capitalists, an economic advantage over those who do not own, the workers, just so long as the workers, the vast majority of the people, recognize and respect those claims and title deeds, or so long as the capitalists hold the political power to sustain and legalize their ownership, which amounts to the same thing, because if the majority of the workers did not recognize and respect those claims and rights of property, the capitalists would not hold the political power very long. In this connection, we would ask, if there is any real power in ownership, why was it, that the Czar, the landowners, and the capitalists, did not use it to maintain their position as the rulers of Russia? They owned everything in sight, while the working class owned nothing. Other instances might be cited, but this is enough for the present.

Now we realize that this article is what its title implies, and that the last word has not been said on the subject by any means, there is enough left to make a good general discussion, or several discussions, in any economic class. We would also like to have the opinion of other "Clarion" writers on the subject. In the meantime, we are waiting.

Waiting for someone to show that economic power and action, is anything other than labor-power applied to the natural resources, for the purpose of producing wealth.

Waiting for someone to show that political power and action is anything other than the "big stick" in all its various forms and manifestations. The power used by a class of parasites to rob a class of slaves, of the fruits of their toil.

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