

# The Poverty of Philosophers

By J. A. McDONALD.

LAST summer, during a lull between study classes, I wrote the Clarion offering to make a trip to Vancouver to debate any member of the S. P. of C. might choose on the question of the British Labor Government and the Party attitude towards it. I considered this the most fitting method of placing a controversial matter fairly and squarely before the workers of Canada and so obviate a long drawn-out discussion in the columns of the Party organ. The debate, or a summary of it, could be published in the Clarion and so reach a wider field of students.

Each member of the triumvirate answered the challenge by a direct refusal to debate. They thought it would be a most unprofitable procedure, or the wording of the resolution didn't quite suit them; or some other petty reason presented itself to avoid the issue. They had no desire to have their philosophical hides tanned on the public platform, where they would be forced to place their cards on the table, and would have no two weeks to figure out irrelevant excuses.

Not so many moons ago the S. P. of C. was itching for debates. They even advertised in the Clarion for opponents. Reforms, Workman's Compensation Acts, Single Tax or religion were all considered "profitable" material to thresh out before a working class audience. But now "the tumult and the shouting dies." Philosophical rot has corroded their once belligerent bosoms. The last issue of the Clarion (No. 933) contains an article by our old friend "C" on "Use and Capacity, in Criticism" that truly "takes the cake." The thin veneer of philosophical patience that almost covered some of his previous contributions is pierced through and he snorts and brays with asinine fury over my article on "Working Class Parties" in the previous issue.

The contention is advanced that I have a point of view all my own on labor parties and their reform position. Oh yes, in a past issue we had it stated that while no one in Canada thought it necessary to take up the matter that one from the U. S. unceremoniously butted in. Appears to me that since that time quite a considerable number of Canadian members and supporters have contributed their quota to the discussion and all with one exception, take substantially the same attitude as myself in opposition to the triumvirate. And I can show by reference to the Clarion of other years that each one of these had the same opinion before they suddenly spied the light in the burning bush and became sloppy.

As to the British Labor Party and its function in modern politics my last article covers the ground concisely and correctly. This is exactly what enrages "C". It exposes his petit bourgeois ideology, and leaves him the laughing stock of the movement. So he must needs accuse me of "dishonesty" and "deliberate misrepresentation."

Had I the pleasure of "C's" attendance in a class on history, both industrial and political, I think I could even at this late date inculcate into his mind a material concept of human and social development. It would serve him much better as a means of explaining society than the combination of Omar Khayam and Marx which, a la Bishop Brown, he possesses today.

"C" is by no means alone in his treatment of history. The Labour Leader, the N. Y. Nation, and many other Liberal and Social-Democratic journals take a similar attitude. They go back to the era of handicraft in the middle ages and see a working class just beginning to find itself. Like the hero in an Alger story, this class grows slowly but surely in strength and clarity of vision, gaining little by little over a lengthy period of years until a stage of maturity is reached and the world is theirs.

If I ever get time from my manifold duties I must write a series of articles for the Clarion portraying the landmarks in both social and class development from the earliest handicraft days up to modern capi-

talism. The stages of partnership, joint stock company, trust and monopoly have never yet been adequately treated by any writer and yet, without a clear understanding of such factors, the political formations cannot be intelligently followed.

Not so many years ago the boss had a function to perform in the workshop. He toiled alongside his employees. The process of capitalist development has divorced him from this position. The different grades of workers find it possible to produce, exchange, finance and distribute all forms of wealth.

Not so many years ago the boss also found it essential that he manipulate all affairs on the political field. From an almost absolute monarchy in the middle ages we find the political power transformed into the keeping of the nobility, aristocracy, and the upper strata of the bourgeoisie until the stage arrives where the workers can be safely entrusted to guard and protect their master's property in a political sense just as they have learned to do in the sphere of economics. The change from Lords Clarendon, Butte, or North to a Lloyd George is as great a departure as from the latter to a Ramsay Macdonald.

As for criticism of the Labor Party "C" wants the "right kind." Sure he does, can you blame him? That is he wants his particular brand of criticism. He wants me to take up the measures introduced in the House of Commons during the late Labor administration and show where the Snowden budget could be profitably amended by increasing the tax on limousines and curtailing the tax on tea. Or by so shaping a Workmen's Compensation Act that the poor widow would get ten bob instead of nine. Or that the department of Naval Affairs could beneficially substitute aircraft for cruisers in the defense of the "bloomin' Hempire."

Yes, this is the sort of criticism he craves for and by the same token this is the sort he is not going to get from me. Being a Marxian student I prefer to analyse the situation as it is rather than have recourse to aerial flights in the realms of imagination.

I am not going to accuse "C" of dishonesty or wilful misrepresentation in the matter, but I am going to call his attention to his statement about middle class minds controlling the revolutionary movement. I made no criticism of the Labor Party on account of its members or leaders not being garbed in dungarees. Never even inferred anything of the kind. So all this palaver about Marx, Engels, etc., is beside the question. My criticism was directed to what they said and did and not to who they were. "C" knows this very well.

Also before closing I must refer briefly to J. H. He contributes an article to the front page entitled "Of Matter of Fact." It has an improvement over "C" in the way of usurping space. But even with the quality of brevity there is more "matter" than "fact" in the article. The fact is confined to a re-admission of the political bankruptcy of the S. P. of C. This is common knowledge and requires no further verification. Here the fact stops and the matter begins.

The case of Winnipeg is again thrown on the screen. "C" did it the last time and as I didn't consider it worth while to refer to it J. H. thinks it will suffice this time. Now, first of all, I want to know where or when I ever took Winnipeg as my ideal of revolutionary action. I have never even insinuated that back there on the prairie is the Mecca I desired.

But, just for the fun of the thing, let us follow the argument. Winnipeg, we are informed, became very straight-laced in the application of Socialist principles. Eventually Winnipeg died. Now, no one could accuse Vancouver of applying such tactics during recent times. Here they bargained with labor parties, and filled a parliamentary ticket by showing in one of theirs with five of labor. After the election they even squawked because their candidate didn't get as many votes as the laborites.

What are the results? Is Vancouver flourishing in a propaganda sense while Winnipeg has died? Read J. H.'s article for the answer. What could be more illogical than the logic of our logicians?

J. H. says, I will be glad to learn of the classes and meetings as conducted in Vancouver. Surely the glad tidings overwhelm me. But when I learn further that there is not one speaker that can attract more than a handful of the faithful at Sunday meetings and, further, that there has been no new blood come into the Party for years I am forced to exclaim with Nicodemus: "How can these things be?" What does it profit a party though it possesses one of the most competent teachers on the continent, and never mentions anything about the Thuringians at propaganda meetings, if its halls are vacant and its pristine purity wasted on the winter air?

As for the mementuous question—Is Kearney Street still cobbled? Well, that one is too deep for me. There is no doubt whatever in my mind but what this question has some profound relation to Marxism else a "true philosopher" would never use it but just what the connection is I'll have to take a week to figure out.

## THE EVOLUTION OF ECONOMIC STRUCTURE IN SOVIET RUSSIA.

(Continued on page 2)

tal in 1924, is an achievement testifying to the capability of the Communists in the financial sphere. The part that is being played by the banks in the development of industry is evidenced by the following figures, the nearest to hand:—The fund capital of the Trade and Commercial Bank was 15½ million gold roubles on the 1st October, 1923; within twelve months it had increased to 32 million roubles. During the same period its active balance had increased from 87 to 284 million roubles, its loan and credit operations had increased by 270 per cent., and its deposits and current accounts by 217 per cent. The Industrial Bank credits to industry during the same period rose from 162 to 400 million roubles.

It will be seen that in the three spheres of nationally organised industry, trade and finance, Russia provides a fascinating study for the economic student. Some of the most important problems arising in the mind of any seriously thinking Socialist have confronted and will continue to confront the Russians. The whole problem of State control is being worked out in day-to-day practice. The vital questions involved in the relationship of State industry to State trading, and of both to State finance, have been raised there in a practical form. The experiment is the more valuable, as their line of development of the structure is evolutionary in its fundamental approach. They are not organising their economic structure according to preconceived theory, but through and at times somewhat shortsighted policy of development through necessity. Soviet Russia has not solved all our problems for us, nor provided us with a perfect pattern to copy. But they have provided us with material to study and profit by, and it would be a pity if we were to allow the political differences between us and the Russian Communists to blind us to the positive value of the economic and financial developments of recent years in Russia.

H. C. Stevens in The Socialist Review, (London)

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