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Revolutions

BY J. HARRINGTON.

Reprinted from "The Red Flag," February 15, 1919.

Note by J. Harrington:

The Editor desires to reproduce this article. But as it was written at a time when Lloyd George was denouncing Soviet Russia as a blood stained monster, and while that tremendous vortex of revolutionary energy the East was still and quiescent, waiting, no doubt, for happier times, when the North West Mounted Police would be hunting boot-leggers instead of raiding the homes of socialists, it will require a few comments.

At that time we were in the Vol. I stage, but we did manage, spite of press censors and committees of Public Safety, post office regulations and holding of subscription money, to get beyond No. I. We also managed to give all the news of Russia possible to crowd into the pages of the "Clarion," "Red Flag" and "Indicator."

Russia was there fighting for her very life, and revolutions were imminent all over Europe. That "revolutionary situation" passed without bearing fruit: what the combined might of civil war, foreign invasion, pestilence and anarchy failed to accomplish has been brought to pass by time and circumstance. A melancholy retrospect! But no amount of bluster, or what Lenin has aptly termed "communist brag," will alter it.

Russia is no longer a pariah among nations and Poincare can not complain of too much politeness from the erstwhile allies of France. Fuel for the British navy and food for the British army, far outweigh every other consideration, and then there must be added trade for British exploitation, and, oh yes! of course!—jobs for British workers.

Russia too has many needs, imperative needs before which all other considerations must be gainsaid. Naturally, some belated rebel, coming to the field full of pep after the battle is long done and the dead buried, will exclaim: The leaders betrayed US. That is another regrettable circumstance; also unavoidable.

But while Russia, the latest and most perfect expression of working class revolution, shakes hands with her former enemies through force of circumstance, the task appointed to those who claim to understand Marx is still the same.

It is not mass action, but mass ignorance we must regard.

We have a task, a lowly one, but quite sufficient for our strength: Preparing the ground and sowing the seed—leaving the order of the seasons to those higher forces which usually function thereat, and leaving perhaps the harvest to a happier generation.

There is one, at least, sufficient advantage in laboring at our task; we seem able to it, and that, amidst a medley of bold promises and no performance, is no mean recompense.

MARX in his 18th Brumaire quotes an English journalist as saying, "The political servant girls of France are mopping away the glowing lava of revolution with old mops and they scold each other while doing their work." This, concerning the days of 1848 and thereabout. The simile is applicable to Europe today, if we substitute flat-ter for scold.

Clemenceau mouths the most commonplace chatter about proverbial French politeness being exceeded by the Allies, and experts in peace, in war, in procedure, in law and jaw, debate and wrangle, barking back to the mud flats of ancient Egypt for

precedent and practice, while the very stones of Europe cry out for Revolution. A terrible state of affairs everyone admits. But most people who have abundance of space reserved for circulating their ideas, in the public press, assume that it is a novel one. They seek to hide former revolutionary activity behind a cloud of words, as it were, as the Olympian Gods were wont to hide certain practices to which even Gods were not adverse, behind a rain cloud.

True, the blanket and feathers of a Mohawk Indian may hide the benign countenance of very respectable fathers of the American Revolution, but no amount of word juggling can disguise the truth; that the Boston Tea Party, was the action of a "lawless mob," in fact when the workers of America got restless in 1881 certain college professors found it policy to denounce the lawlessness of the revolutionary fathers, who as a matter of actual fact, but for the hanging together of the colonial working class, would have hung separately, if I may make a slight correction in Franklin's famous witticism.

Remember, furthermore, the many glorious revolutions of England and France, where at times the bourgeoisie were not above starting a revolution at home, while their country was at war abroad. The Magna Charta, in whose memory our childish minds were bid to bend in awe, was wrested from a sovereign by armed force, while that sovereign was at war with France, and was restored or rather reaffirmed at least thirty times in five centuries.

The last Emperor of France, Napoleon III, lost his crown while engaged in a war with Germany, not by "constitutional methods" but by a "lawless mob." These facts certainly can not be unknown to the frantic individuals who are assisting the European "political servant girls" to mop up the revolutionary lava; not, it is true, with an old mop, but with a new ink ribbon. If by any chance they forget the rhapsodies of their school marm, they cannot forget that "the poor fifty million" (per Dr. Dillon) "Russians left to the mercy of lawless Bolshevism," must themselves confess to certain "lawless practices" concerning the flight of one Nicholas.

But these were great events. I speak of past events now, participators in which were fortunate in making their revolutionary activity good. They live in the minds of their grateful countrymen; the theme of the poet, and the entire intellectual furniture of the politicians. Former successful revolutions are the bourgeois heaven. Present ones the bourgeois hell.

However, these glorious events of song and story and July celebrations were not the only revolutions the world has seen. Lurking in the pages of authoritative historians, slave revolts might be traced as far back as history can take us. These sporadic and isolated uprisings were repressed with the most cowardly brutality anywhere recorded of humankind. The means used for the slaughter were those calculated to destroy the maximum number in the minimum of time. No considerations of mercy ever ended the slaughter. Fear of pestilence through decay and putrefaction of dead bodies, too numerous for the living to properly dispose of, or actual apprehension for the supply of labor, were the angels of mercy, which restrained the maddened madness of a weak and cowardly master class, driven insane by a brief exhibition of their slaves' tremendous power.

Omitting the great slave revolts of antiquity we read throughout Feudalism of sectional revolts drowned in blood. Some serfs conceive the anti-social, anarchistic, Bolshevist, unpatriotic concept that they will no longer sleep in straw piles and eat the food of hogs. All the social forces are used to blot such vile beastly creatures from the earth. But no fabulous monster of the demi-god period ever multiplied with more terrifying surety than does this same spirit of revolt. Stamped out in one place, the master has scarcely time to clean up the bloody mess than another outbreak demands his attention. From demanding conditions of existence equal to that of swine and getting them, the path of revolu-

tion, along which moves the "lawless mob," led the servile class through twenty centuries of slaughter and slavery, to houses and clothes and grub which belong exclusively to man. But throughout those twenty centuries the voice of the slave grows increasingly louder and his demands more intelligent.

We stand at the end of the so-far travelled way and hear echoes of the strife long past; the Jacquerie in France, the peasants of England; high above the petty human suffering, we can hear the agonizing cry of that terrible defeat, of the fiendish acts which followed the slaughter and compelled the nobility to protest that a continuation would leave the country devoid of serfs.

The wage workers of France are heard for a few days; again, the peasants of England and the Jacques of France. Then comes the peasants' war of Europe, where the slaves of Bohemia establish a new society which resists the combined might of European chivalry for a score of years. The ever-changing cry is never wholly silent. It might be a scarce-heard whisper, a group of serfs in revolt against the petty landlords; stifled ere articulate, preserved in the wine of a bishop to a pope; or it might be the thunder roll of the great French Revolution, shattering the entire social structure and monopolizing the literature of a century.

But as we near our epoch the cry assumes a distinct identity, it is no longer chaotic and unintelligible. It is not the cry of ignorance, weakly battling against unbearable conditions of life and overwhelming powers of coercion. It is the intelligent cry of a class grown rich in experience, powerful in knowledge, and constant in trial. It is the voice of the revolution plus intelligence.

Change is the one unchanging factor in human affairs. The instruments of labor we have used, from the stone hammer to the hydraulic press; the power we have utilized, from the strong arm to the hydro-electric, have sung of revolution, have raised us from grovelling, panic-stricken multitudes shivering in the dark, with provender for but a day, to clear-brained social individuals, with provisions, did we own them, stored away sufficient for years. A button turned, floods our houses with brilliant light, a turn of a wheel provides us with warmth. The tremendous urge of this vast machine is towards revolution, and its voice cannot be drowned by the clicking of the typewriter, however vigorously pounded.

But revolution, own child of the machine, comes when it will come. No cosmic cop stands at the crossroads of social progress directing the traffic. Nor has any cosmic mechanic devised a "Little Ben" which, with one short blast, or one long, or a series of intermittent ones, will announce to slumbering social organisms that the hour of revolution has come. We loiter at the spot to which our forefathers strove mightily to attain. The machine has to affect ten million minds and, then, though the process may be painful, society has to strike its camp and move forward to new hunting grounds. It has done so, many times, in the past. In the years which lie before the human family it will do so many times again.

HERE AND NOW AND

CLARION MAINTENANCE FUND

Acknowledgments are held over until next issue of Here and Now and C. M. F. receipts. A domestic fitting has interrupted the order of life somewhat and next issue will see us back to routine.

We note with approval the reproduction of Clarion articles by Comrade Ross ("R") in the "Maoriland Worker" and the "International Communist" (Australia). Also by "R" "The Burning Bush" from the Clarion in the O. B. U. Bulletin, (Winnipeg). All these are acknowledged.

Comrade Kirk's able contribution "War in the Pacific—What For" (in two parts) was reproduced by "The Revolutionary Socialist" (Australia) without acknowledgment to the Clarion. We note with curiosity some remarks on Immigrants from a recent Clarion, reproduced in the O. B. U. Bulletin and credited to an anonymous "exchange."