

# When the Gods Thirst

THESE are days of cataclysmic change, and therefore it is not unnatural that one should often hear the question, especially from people with whom one's views are more or less under suspicion, "Are you in favour of revolution?" The questioner is usually somewhat afraid of his question, and his trepidation is betrayed by the manner, half bantering, half challenging, in which he puts it. Such queries seem to us extraordinary; as extraordinary, indeed, as would be the question "Do you believe in hurricanes?" Since hurricanes arise from certain atmospheric conditions which it is beyond the power of man to alter, one's approval or disapproval of them is a matter of little practical interest; and since revolutions result from political and economical conditions which are also pretty well outside the sphere of influence of the average person, the question whether one believes in them or not is irrelevant. The parallel is not quite exact, since it is possible, although extremely difficult, for human beings to affect the conditions making for revolution in such a way as to avert it. We shall touch on this point again a little later; what we wish now to emphasize is that, given the political and economic conditions which make for revolution, it will come, in spite of men's opinions concerning it, as inevitably as storms occur in the physical world.

One may, of course, find people who believe in revolution—who believe, that is, that it is necessary—and one may find people who work actively to bring it about; and the majority of people no doubt believe that it is to the propaganda carried on by "the rabid, lawless, anarchistic and disgruntled element of society," to use Mr. Daugherty's comprehensive phrase, that we must look for the causes of revolution. That there is a disgruntled element of society, is incontestable; and that when revolution actually appears, it is this disgruntled element that mans the barricades and storms the Government buildings, is also incontestable. But this element is not casual. It is the natural product of the exploitation which is at the basis of our economic order. When a predatory economic system has been developed so far that the vast majority of people are reduced to misery and want, and the exploiting classes have become correspondingly corrupted in the process, the next step is revolution; not because this person or that person has advocated it, but because life under such an order has become intolerable. The most effective workers for revolution in France were the privileged classes; and the same thing was true of the old regime in Russia. Peoples are slow to revolt, because their actions are dictated not by reason but by their economic condition. It takes an incredible amount of oppression, abuse and actual starvation to bring them to the point of rebellion.

Once they have been brought to that point, the forces released by their action are likely to produce strange and terrible effects. We have lately been re-reading Anatole France's vivid picture of the Reign of Terror in "Les Dieux ont Soif," and we were impressed anew with the cruelty of the French Revolution, the suffering that it visited upon innocent people, and the hideousness of the passions that it released. We do not know what M. France's intention was in writing the book, but we can not help wondering whether it was to remind the French people of the fearful price that their grandfathers paid for the dubious political blessings that they themselves are now enjoying. Yet the French Revolution, terrible though it was, extravagant and often ridiculous, marked a great step towards freedom. It did not establish liberty, equality and universal brotherhood, but it established the right to aspire to those ideals. It failed to establish freedom because it did not abolish privilege; it merely redistributed privilege; but it performed an immeasurable service in clearing away the dead lumber of feudalism and freeing men's thought from feudalistic ideology, and in substituting for the old form of government by a divinely

ordained sovereign, political forms which were at least popular in semblance.

If the leaders of the French Revolution had understood that freedom is a matter of economics, and not of politics, and that it can not exist while it is possible for one class in society to live by the labour of another class, the history of the last century might have been very different from what it has been. There was a school of economists in France at the outbreak of the Revolution that could have enlightened them in this respect—the Physiocrats; but they were connected in the popular mind with the old regime, and were therefore discredited. Moreover, the French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution; its leaders sprang from the middle class, and the middle class was as jealous of its rights in property and land as the old aristocracy had ever been. It is no wonder, therefore, that Robespierre declared that to advocate the division of land and property was to make enemies for the Revolution. It remained for the Russian Revolution, after a century and a half of so-called popular government had shown that the more political government changes, the more of it is the same thing, to proclaim to the world the fact that freedom can not exist where one class in society is legally empowered to exploit another; and to attempt to establish an order of society in which such exploitation would not be possible. Incidentally, we believe that the Russian Revolution will be found to have done great service to the world in helping to abolish the quasi-religious worship of established political institutions that succeeded the old superstitious veneration for monarchs.

The Russian Revolution may fail to establish the order its leaders desire to inaugurate. If it does fail, then the Russian people will be obliged to endure again, sooner or later, the agony of revolution and counter revolution. The peoples of Western Europe and America most certainly have this prospect to face, unless by some miracle they show themselves wise enough to put a curb on their exploiting classes. The parliamentary machinery which has been developed during the past century and a half has failed to halt the enrichment of the few and the impoverishment of the many; and its failure has been largely due to the inability of the peoples to recognize their own interest and use that machinery to further it. This inability, which is due to ignorance, apathy and misdirected education, has caused control of popular forms of government to pass into the hands of the people who are interested in having their privileges ensured by legal sanction. Yet it is not impossible, although it seems highly improbable, that the creaking machinery of popular government might be utilized to abolish those very monopolies and privileges for whose perpetuation government has so long existed. For example, if the land-values campaign in England had succeeded, it is theoretically conceivable that the English people might have elected representatives who would have put in force, through the existing legal procedure, changes quite as revolutionary as anything contemplated by the Russian leaders. It is possible, of course, that such changes would have caused civil war, for those who enjoy privilege do not part with it easily; but in such case the onus of revolt would have been upon the privileged classes rather than upon the disinherited. In this country, where the popular forms of government are cumbersome and inflexible, their effective use in the popular interest would be even more difficult than in France or England; yet the thing is not flatly impossible. In this respect those nations which have parliamentary government are better situated than were the Russians under the Tzar or the French under Louis XVI. They can use the forms of government for the purpose of changing its content.

They can not do this, however, until they come to see clearly what is wrong with the present order, and what steps are necessary to change it. The disillusionment of the war and the period which has

followed it has been an invaluable educational force. The Russian Revolution has been another. Indeed, the educational process has been speeded up enormously during the past few years; but whether it will win the race against revolution is a question. We should be inclined to feel more cheerful about the probable outcome, if the British Labour party had not pledged itself to save the economic situation in England by a capital levy! (\*) At such moments we are sure that revolution will win; and perhaps it is a feeling akin to our own which makes the fearful inquire with bated breath whether or not one is in favor of it. The Freeman (N. Y.)

(\*) The British Parliamentary Labor Party has advocated a Capital Levy on a general plan (still in the propaganda stage), the same to be effective subject to electoral approval and the approval also of financial and departmental experts as a definite practical measure. If the Labor Party has "pledged itself to save the economic situation in England" in this way we have not yet seen the text of the pledge.—Editor Clarion.

## LENIN'S LIFE AND WORK.

(Continued from page 2)

ariat for power, from the view-point of the choice of suitable allies for the proletariat in its struggle.

Kautsky saw these allies only in the agricultural workers. But whether his rejection of the attempt (designated by him as opportunism) to win over the poor peasantry was merely the result of a correct or a faulty application of Marxism, or the result of the passivity of German Social Democracy, the result of its practical renunciation of the struggle for power and the limitation of the horizon of the German proletariat to a horizon of craft interests—this question is best answered by the fact that German Social Democracy did not even know how to begin the struggle for winning over those village strata which Kautsky held to be the allies of the proletariat: the agricultural labourers. Lenin discovered in the peasantry an ally for the struggle of the proletariat for power, and taught for decades, through all the ups and downs of Russian history, the need for creating an alliance between the fighting proletariat and the peasantry.

(To be continued in next issue)

## THE BRITISH LABOR COLLEGE MOVEMENT.

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educational machinery. The dangers of oversimplification, of "short cuts" to knowledge, must be faced and overcome. The need for a more widespread understanding, by proletarians, of the "whys and wherefores" of the proletarian position is obvious. It is that need which the British Labour College movement is trying to meet.—"Inprecorr."

## SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

### PROPAGANDA MEETINGS

EVERY SUNDAY

### THEATRE ROYAL

SUNDAY MARCH 30.

Speaker: W. A. PRITCHARD

Subject: "Socialism as a New Order."

All meetings at 8 p.m.  
Questions. Discussion.