

THE TRIAL OF JOHN BALL (1381)

Sir John Tresilian.

John Ball, you are accused of stirring up
The poor deluded people to rebellion;
Not having the fear of God and of the King
Before your eyes; of preaching up strange notions,
Heretical and treasonous; such as saying
That kings have not a right from heaven to govern;
That all mankind are equal; and that ranks,
And the distinctions of society,
Aye, and the sacred right of property,
Are evil and oppressive;—plead you guilty
To this most heavy charge?

John Ball.

If it be guilty

To preach what you are pleased to call strange notions:
That all mankind as brethren must be equal;
That privileged orders of society
Are evil and oppressive; that the right
Of property is a juggle to deceive
The poor whom you oppress; I plead me guilty.

Sir John Tresilian.

Did you not tell the mob they were oppressed,
And preach upon the equality of man;
With evil intent thereby to stir them up
To tumult and rebellion?

John Ball.

That I told them

That all mankind are equal is most true;
Ye came as helpless infants to the world;
Ye feel alike the infirmities of nature;
And at last moulder into common clay.
Why, then, these vain distinctions? . . . Bears not the earth
Food in abundance? Must your granaries
Overflow with plenty, while the poor man starves?
Sir Judge, why sit you there clad in your furs?
Why are your cellars stor'd with choicest wines?
Your larders hung with dainties? while your vassal
As virtuous and as able, too, by nature,
Tho' by selfish tyranny depriv'd
Of mind's improvement, shivers in his rags,
And starves amid the plenty he creates,
I have said this is wrong, and I repeat it—
And there will be a time when this great truth
Shall be confess'd—be felt by all mankind,
The electric truth shall run from man to man,
And the blood-cemented pyramid of greatness
Shall fall before the flash!

PLATFORM

Socialist Party of
Canada

We, the Socialist Party of Canada affirm our allegi-
ance to, and support of the principles and programme
of the revolutionary working class.

Labor, applied to natural resources, produces all
wealth. The present economic system is based upon
capitalist ownership of the means of production, conse-
quently, all the products of labor belong to the capital-
ist class. The capitalist is, therefore, master; the
worker a slave.

So long as the capitalist class remains in possession
of the reins of government all the powers of the State
will be used to protect and defend its property rights in
the means of wealth production and its control of the
product of labor.

The capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-
swelling stream of profits, and to the worker, an ever
increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in setting
itself free from capitalist exploitation by the abolition
of the wage system, under which this exploitation, at
the point of production, is cloaked. To accomplish
this necessitates the transformation of capitalist prop-
erty in the means of wealth production into socially
controlled economic forces.

The irrepressible conflict of interest between the
capitalist and the worker necessarily expresses itself
as a struggle for political supremacy. This is the
Class Struggle.

Therefore we call upon all workers to organize un-
der the banner of the Socialist Party of Canada, with
the object of conquering the political powers for the
purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic
programme of the working class, as follows:

- 1—The transformation, as rapidly as possible,
of capitalist property in the means of
wealth production (natural resources, factor-
ies, mills, railroads, etc.) into collective
means of production.
- 2—The organization and management of indus-
try by the working class.
- 3—The establishment, as speedily as possible,
of production for use instead of production
for profit.

Sir John Tresilian.
Audacious rebel!

How darest thou insult this sacred court,
Blaspheming all the dignities of rank?
How could the Government be carried on
Without the sacred orders of the king
And the nobility?

John Ball.

What does the Government avail the peasant?
Would not he plow his field, and sow the corn,
Aye, and in peace enjoy the harvest, too?
Would not the sunshine and the dews descend,
Tho' neither King nor Parliament existed?
Do your court politics aught matter him?
Would he be warring even unto the death
With his French neighbors?—Charles and Richard contend;
The people fight and suffer:—Think ye, Sir,
If neither country had been cursed with chief,
The peasants would have quarrell'd?

—From Robert Southey's "Wat Tyler."

Correspondence

"BY THE WAY."

Editor Clarion:

I have followed with some interest the articles by Com-
rade "C." under the heading "By the Way," in which he
sets forth his antagonism to that "state of mind" which
can conceive of no other road to freedom than that which
is battered open by physical force.

He apparently leaves his case on the all-pervasive in-
terlocking and interdependent nature of social activities
under modern capitalism, together with the character of
the means of making human beings in the mass now in
the possession of the modern state. The latter element,
in "C's." opinion, banishes from the realm of possibility
any prospect of success through physical force exercised
by a revolutionary class. Consideration of the former el-
ement convinces him that even if successful, a revolution
by force would involve a condition of "irremediable social
chaos" and could only result in providing the "grave of
revolutionary hopes and ideals." (Vide Clarion, Nov. 16).

Comrade "C." seems to be obsessed with the weight,
power and efficiency of the capitalist regime, its industrial
and economical efficiency, domination of mental view
points, ideals, traditions, etc., etc. He seems to have
overlooked entirely the fact that the civilization of any
dominant class produces its own antithesis in the form
of ideals, mental conceptions and viewpoints in the heads
of the class which suffers under that domination. These
viewpoints, etc., which gradually force their way through-
out the social milieu, are in diametric opposition to those
of the ruling class, and produce in their adherents the
sense of class consciousness, their potential class power,
and implacable hostility to the dominant class, with its
inculcations of respect for its own law and order, tradi-
tions and viewpoints. As the ruling class increases in
wealth, power and arrogance it but feeds the flame of re-
sentment and revolt in the ranks of that class which feels
its own struggle for a bare existence becoming more diffi-
cult under the oppression of a wealth and power which
it realizes is based on its own sweat and toil.

Every capitalist country has this revolutionary move-
ment knawing at its vitals, circulating its literature, organ-
izing its study classes, and forcing its propaganda farther
and farther afield. Force used in the hope of suppressing
it but drives it underground, where it proceeds to accumu-
late until it bursts forth in destructive eruption, and the
rulers find that their methods of repression have resulted
in a sympathy for the revolutionary class being mani-
fested in quarters where it was previously absent. Organ-
ized anti-propaganda only succeeds in advertising the
movement, whose qualified spokesmen can vanquish the
best apologists the capitalists can produce. Like Ban-
quo's ghost, "It will not down." It breaks out in the most
unexpected quarters. See the increasing number of arti-
cles by recognized experts, technicians, professors, scien-
tists in every field of research, social workers, financial
experts, and so on, confirming and reinforcing the argu-
ments of the anti-capitalists, that are finding their way in-
to channels of publication that are closed to the frankly
revolutionary movement. The support and confirmation
they give is doubtless involuntary and unconscious in the
majority of instances, but the cumulative effect is not the
less valuable. It is corroborative evidence from the oppo-
site camp and is of valuable assistance in undermining the
enemy morale. Press, courts, parliaments, schools, relig-
ion, statesmanship, are all targets for this destructive crit-
icism, so busily engaged in removing "the alp of tradition
from the brain of the living."

Capitalist ideology is not invulnerable. Like all others,
it is based on a certain method of social production and
distribution of wealth. While there was room for it to
function in the process of developing and perfecting its
social production of wealth, it was socially valid, being
justified by social necessity. Now that the process is com-
pleted and production organized to the point where social
ownership is an imperative necessity, it is no longer valid,
but an anachronism, out of joint with and an impediment

to further progress. As such it is being rapidly under-
mined and swept aside. Modern machine production is
constantly making important changes in technique, and the
minds of those who live in its environment are far more
susceptible to rapid changes in their mental outlook than
were the minds of those who lived under the stable con-
ditions of pre-capitalist production.

Viewing the subject from this standpoint the writer is
unable to endorse the pessimistic attitude taken by "C."
If the task of the revolutionary movement is a gigantic
one, so is its reservoir of strength needed to accomplish it.
It must prove equal to its task, or history is falsified. To
assume that the transformation from the last form of slav-
ery to freedom will come merely as the result of slow
changes in social viewpoints and patchwork reforms se-
cured by or granted to the slaves by the masters appears
to be as visionary and unpractical a state of mind to me
as does a revolution by force to "C." Neither does it seem
to be within the bounds of probability that the present
dominant class can be legislated reformed and trans-
formed out of its function as a social parasite without be-
ing fully aware of the process and developing all the
means of resistance at hand. The services of the old mid-
wife force will be requisitioned as before. The compar-
ative slenderness of their numbers as compared to their
enemies tends to make them more class conscious and
jealous of their powers and privileges, which they will not
surrender to anything less than an overwhelming display
of force.

To cultivate and diffuse the knowledge to guide that
force and its exercise is our present task. The final out-
come is as heartening and encouraging to the thinking
worker as it must be dark and full of foreboding to the in-
telligent capitalist who has given it serious study.

J. H. B.

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