

Toward Modernization

IN this and another article I propose to deal with Comrade McDonald's attack of two issues ago upon my argumentation against certain positions and attitudes of the S. P. of C. In all my argumentation, and of this and previous articles, I am moved by a motive that goes far beyond my desire for changes in the party positions and attitudes or, at this present, to turn the tables on Mac. My motive, presumptuous enough, is to do what I think is distressingly needful, that is, to do what I can to modernize the thought of the revolutionary wing of the working class movement. Hence the discursive, moralizing character of my argument, and the use of the method of indirection in attack, no doubt so exasperating to critics. There now, I am out in the open. Passing up much that I consider disputable in Comrade McDonald's article I pass on to the main issue—the anti-labor party position of the S. P. of C. As to the question of our party's anti-reform attitude and its apathetic interest in non-violent and constitutional procedures in social change, those issues are, in my conception, secondary, though so much related to the main issue that decision upon it, one way or the other, predisposes conclusions on the others. Contrarily, the Party, I contend, elevated the question of reforms to first place. It is anti-labor party because it is first anti-reform. The reason for that will evolve as I proceed, as will also the reason why I consider the reformism of labor parties a secondary matter and not the prime criterion by which to judge those parties.

The main issue, the anti-labor party position of the S. P. of C., Comrade McDonald supports and I argue against. As to reforms, I contend the Party attitude is anti-reform and argue against the attitude. Comrade McDonald, however, denies the Party is anti-reform and asks me for proof in Party literature. Later I shall quote the Party Manifesto in support of my contention. Moreover, aside from my own experience of twelve or fourteen years' membership, I think it is common knowledge that Party propaganda and Party sentiment has been anti-reform as a corollary to the anti-labor party position. Against my charge of anti-reform, Comrade McDonald erects a barricade, his defence reaction, from behind which he fires his denial. This is his creation—"if," says he, "we find them (reforms) useful, we adopt them to our needs as a class. . . ." though, (laying down his conception of the position of Marx) "we leave the extension of reforms to the ruling class. . . ." So the working class adopt ruling class reforms if they are useful, do they? How handy words are for elevating a necessity into a virtue. What then is implied in Comrade McDonald's revolutionary-position-according-to-Marx? Just this, that the sole initiative and source of reforms, speaking politically, shall rest in the ruling class; and that a function of the Socialist parties is to maintain this state by opposing and, if possible, destroying all reform political organizations of the working class, though struggling for reforms on the very field where the class-struggle must find its maturist expression. Not, apparently, until the working masses are fit to subscribe to the single plank of revolutionary overthrow are they to be permitted to enter as an independent movement into the most vital of all mediums of development, that of open and direct political struggle. I contend that is what the Party position of anti-labor party amounts to. Is that position the position of Marx? I, at least, deny it.

No wonder so many socialists are so barren in their theorizing on the problem of change, for, holding that position, they are thrust back ever and again upon that blighting theory, from whence the party position derives, doctrinally, of progressive misery, social collapse and violent overturn as the sole hope and efficacious means of social revolution. How commonplace that theory sounds when put in the idiom of the drifter—"things must get worse

before they get better;" and how it spreads its paralyzing contagion because the sentiment is so pervasive in the underlying community. What does a man want with science who has once got possessed of that theory, except perhaps to fortify his prepossession. He ceases to push forward his frontiers of knowledge, he dangerously near becomes an anti-social ghoul, anticipating and taking a cold-blooded delight in social calamities. Thus segregating himself, breaking the ties of sympathetic interest in their struggles, he loses the chance of a real understanding of people; and his interest in political affairs tends to be cynical, perfunctory and superficial. I meet them, socialists of bitter conviction, real logical anti-reformers, lost to the active life of the labor movement, centers of radiating apathy and despair, looking forward to the next great war or economic crisis. Uncompromising anti-reformers, they see in improved conditions for the working masses nothing but prolongation of the system. The Labor Party in Great Britain is saving the capitalist system for the capitalists; that is how they see it. And logically so, since their premise is the theory of increasing misery and progressive degradation. There are others again who, while holding to the theory, compromise grudgingly. The theory has its ridiculous side, for to be logical, the working class should be advised to cease struggling. Both animal instinct and their reason run contrary to the advice, however, since it is an invitation to suicide. So there is compromise first with the trade union movement. But there is no interest in reforms and ameliorations, as such, they hate them, it is the struggle and the use that can be made of it and of the organizations for ulterior revolutionary purpose where the interest lies. And now they are at the political labor organizations in the same fashion, inspired by the same animus, and the same ulterior purpose. And it is all wrong except the revolutionary purpose. All that reasoning is wrong and all that activity is wrong that is based on the theory of misery. The theory is a fallacy. The experience of history is that abject misery carries with it deterioration and abject subjection. On the contrary, I subscribe to this theory: "That the social revolution must be carried out, not by an anaemic working class under the pressure of abject privation, but by a body of full blooded working men gradually gaining strength from improved conditions of life. Instead of the revolution being worked out through the leverage of desperate misery, every improvement in working class conditions is to be counted as a gain for the revolutionary forces." "This," says Veblen, "is a good Darwinism, but it does not belong to the neo-Hegelian Marxism." If I may use those barbarisms, the latter tag describes the Party position. Mine, I am a neo-Darwinian Marxist. Which means to say that the mechanics of my scheme of causation is Darwinian, as the primary position of my outlook on the social process, that no end, no good, no socialist commonwealth governs and determines the line of development of the process. That is putting the cart before the horse in Hegelian fashion. Socialism is not inevitable by virtue of a trend "in the nature of things." Man is the only purposive factor in the process. In the Darwinian scheme, the process is the thing. And the "end," the resultant at any particular time, evolves out of the struggle, out of the clash of the forces engaged. Therefore, as I see the social process, the means govern and determine the end. That is, I must not be continually occupied with dreaming of my ideal, thinking it will come in its "own" time, but must concentrate on the "means" to the "end" if it is ever to be realized. Reforms are such means, reforms for better conditions for the working masses, reforms for social controls over social processes, and reforms institutional in character, instituted with the socialist "end" in view. "The emancipation of the working class is the work of the working class itself," through

their representative mass organizations, economic and political. The function of socialist parties is such as to prevent them ever being representative, it is to keep ahead of the masses intellectually, to educate, to criticize, to create socialist opinion, which, by the initiating force of the mass organizations may be translated into practical effect in and during the transition to a new order.

Comrade McDonald's article leads me to think that in some particulars he misunderstands me, due partly no doubt to my wretched presentation of my point of view, and perhaps also because he has read me in too hostile a temper, jealous for the integrity of the old standards of the party. Allowing, however, something for those causes, there are still differences in our outlook that I can only put down to his not having given sufficient consideration to certain features of the Marxian theory of history, on the one hand, and on the other, to wide areas, as it were, of the problem of change, comparatively recently opened up, not having engaged his interest. On the latter point first: I fail to detect any influence of the later modern science in Comrade McDonald's thought, or even a hint of curiosity as to what it has to say about the problem. Apparently it was all thought out, the last word said, years and years ago and all we have to do now is polish up the old ideological furniture. Even the virtue of an occasional suspended judgment seems absent from his philosophy; he betrays no doubts; his discussion runs easily in the vein of the untroubled, complacent, ante-bellum period—Yea! Yea! and Nay! Nay. as though it were given to any generation of men to grasp the whole truth. How is that? for I hear it admitted on all sides that the social sciences—sciences, so-called by courtesy—are still only in their infancy. While how vast and complex the capitalist world today, with its problems of modern complications reaching far down into the remoteness of history and entwined in the roots of our refractory human nature. A terrible thought intrudes itself here: You and I, Mac, are doomed never to meet on common ground, therefore never to reach approximately similar conclusions or matters in dispute, without terrific strain of sacrifice in compromise, unless you move over, intellectual bag and baggage, into the twentieth century, or better, not to leave me behind, strive as I do, to pay it a visit now and then and make a feint at being up to date.

Enough of graceless chiding on that score; its bumptious air irks my guts, and there is the matter of Marx's science yet. Comrade McDonald claims to rest his case against me on the grounds of the Marxism of Marx and in favor of the anti-labor party position. I have, in previous articles, been arguing against that position and for the recognition of labor parties, partly on the grounds of modern science, calling in Marx as auxiliary support, as it were, because of the weight of his name. Nevertheless, though modern grounds for my point of view are the strongest, I am confident to rely on Marx and intend to present a series of quotations from him supporting my position. Let me state my basis for recognition of labor parties again, clearer if I can. I hold that recognition of labor parties does not hinge on the matter of their reformist character, but on whether they are representative of an independent movement of the working class in politics. So long as Marx held to the tenets of his theory of historical development and its scheme of causation, he would have supported labor parties on the latter ground; he could no other, though a thousand years instead of thirty rolled by. This contention I propose to support by quoting Marx.

But, by reason of the treatment already accorded my previous quotations from Marx by Comrade McDonald and other critics, I have no confidence in their power to grasp the bearing of those that are to follow on the question at issue. So, for the rest of this article I will consider they are rusty on Marx's

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