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A WEEKLY NEWS LETTER

WORKERS' EDUCATION

At the February meeting of the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor a resolution providing for the co operative service of the Workers' Education Bureau in conjunction with the Educational Committee of the A.F. of L. was presented and unanimously passed. This resolution provides that the different trade union bodies in the country may secure from the Workers' Education Bureau (address, 465 West 23rd St. New York City) advice and service in the development of educational work in connection with trade unions. This movement for workers' education is one with which the Educational Committee has been deeply concerned for many months, and they are glad at this time to be able to announce a co-operative arrangement with this Bureau for the extension of service to the different trade union organizations.

The Workers' Education Bureau has sent to the public libraries of the cities of this country in which there are Central Labor Unions, a copy of the Volume. This volume of 144 pages, containing an introduction by Mr Gompers, which can be secured from the Bureau shows the development of workers' education.

Every trade unionist should know about this movement. Ask your librarian for the copy of this Report. Further information on this movement can be obtained by writing to the Chairman of this Committee, care American Federation of Labor Building, Washington, D.C.

NATIONAL PROSPERITY AND INDUSTRIAL PEACE

(Continued from last week.)

Where Capitalism Has Succeeded.

Capitalism has also another merit. It does not burden posterity with the cost of its failures. Success in business may win too great rewards, but failures are written off. An enormous proportion of all money put up for a new enterprise is lost—the invention does not prove a commercial success, the mine is not a payable proposition, the trade expected is not there, the organizers have been incompetent, or the public taste has changed. Such are the reasons recorded over and over again why money put up by inventors or capitalists must be written up as a dead loss. Yet for all this the public has gained. The enterprise while it lasted has given orders and employment. The experiment has paved the way for something better, without charging its losses to its cost.

It may be argued that Capitalism has played its part and that the day for a less vigorous and creative system has come. It is true that the economic is only one sphere of human activity and that there are other values, moral and mental, of greater moment. The day will come when the economic foundations of civilization are complete. But that day has certainly not dawned yet. Povrety and inadequate resources are the of the commonest and most distressing features of our time. If we are to have a healthy, energetic, friendly, competent society, all citizens must have adequate housing, sufficient food and clothing, education, recreation and so forth to enable them to make the best of themselves. In none even of the most advanced western communities is that true to-day, and when we look at mankind as a whole the work that has to be done to lay the foundations of civilization is staggering. The world needs commodities in vastly increased quantities, at reduced prices, and of improved quality. It needs the very best that the system of individual enterprise, admittedly the most productive, can give it, working at its greatest efficiency. We have only to look at Central Europe, at Russia, at Asia, Africa, and South America to see what needs to be done. If civilization is to triumph it will be because efficient than private, then it will survive and the community will benefit. But if private enterprise is more efficient and produces a better article at a lower price, it will steadily but inexorably press the less effective Government service out of existence, just as motor busses and tubes in London have cut heavily into the business of the tramway system and are now beginning to cut into the business of the railways. While therefore there is a great deal to be said for nationalising or municipalising certain services, especially those nearing the monopoly stage, the argument for doing so is not that all private enterprise is bad and all government enterprise is good on religious or social grounds, but that in the particular instance it is beneficial.

Socialism, indeed, unlike Communism is not an attack on Capitalism as such. It leaves private enterprise unchecked, but trusts to improving society by proving by experience that a great part of the natoinal activities can be more efficiently conducted by public rather than private hands. The success of Socialism is very doubtful as our war experience showed, and its progress must in any case be very slow. Moreover in competition with private enterprise Socialism offers no dramatic inducements to the workers. The conditions and wages of the workers in socialized industries, except such as are absolute monopolies, like the Army and Navy, will not be appreciably better than the conditions and wages in private enterprise. Public ownership must pay interest on capital—including even capital wasted—and it must produce a commodity or service at a competitive price. It cannot pay wages higher than are economically warranted without being driven out of existence by its rival. If, for instance the nationalisation of the railways meant higher rights or fares, mechanical transport will rapidly take such a share of the traffic as will make the railways financially bankrupt, ending in their disappearance, or in their once more returning to a level dictated by competition and the efficiency and hard work of the employees from top to bottom. Similarly with coal. A very high price of coal means that it will be important more cheaply from abroad, or oil will be used in substitution. And if tariffs or legislation are used to protect nationalized industries it will simply mean that British manufacturers cannot compete abroad, and one third of our people will be unemployed and starving. As a matter of fact experience shows that from the point of view of the employee the benefits of public ownership are not transcendental. There is not peace and harmony among the employees of the municipal enterprises of the Kingdom. Nor is there in the Post Office despite wages and conditions which have caused such a rise in cost that the community is in rebellion. Nor is there even in the co-operative movement, where the control is directly in working class hands. Nationalisation may have advantages in many instances but it certainly does not mean a paradise for the working man. Moreover, Socialism stopping short of Communism suffers from the serious burden in competition with Capitalism, that it can never write off its failures. It raises money on municipal or national credit and whether the enterprises on which the capital is expended fail or succeed it must still continue to pay interest on its bonds. As we have seen, private capital simply disappears, the individual being the loser. Socialism therefore unless it confines its activities to a relatively few safe monopolies is burdened by an ever-growing load of debt, incurred in the name of creative enterprise, but lost through misjudgment or mismanagement.

Socialism is sometimes justified on the ground that competition is wrong. Competition merely designed to crush competitors producing the same articles is wrong. Competition in the form of an honest emulation in improving products and methods in the interests of progress is the life blood of civilization, and all attemps to do away with it will be as disastrous as they will certainly fail.

As a matter of fact Socialism is no alternative to Capitalism, so called. Communism is, but Socialism is not. Communism fails because human nature will not stand the substitution of a universal military discipline under bureaucratic control, for individual liberty as we, at any rate in the English-speaking world, have known it. It fails too because we are not more likely to find bureaucrats and politicians whom we will trust to control the smallest details of our private lives as well as the larger direction of commerce, transportation and industry. Socialism fails as a general alternative, because it allows private enterprise by its side. Socialism, as contrasted with Communism, is no more than the theory that public enterprise will gradually encroach on private enterprise because it is more efficient and popular. But it does not, as Communism does, set out to prohibit or prevent private enterprise. It relies for its success on its demonstrated superiority and on nothing else. As the war showed, it is extremely doubtful whether in most spheres public management can compete against the ceaseless competition of private enterprise. Moreover, every attempt to make Socialism succeed by restricting private competition for instance by hobbling its rivals makes its failure more complete, by raising indignation against it for restricting the development and enterprise upon which our civilization depends, in order to maintain high prices or inefficiency for its own products.

Both Communism and Socialism—as systems of society—are in their essence opposed to British instincts. They came to birth in Germany and they regard the community organized as an entity the State as everything. And it is to the State, which is another name for officials and politicians, that they would give all power. In the British Empire a different idea prevails. The Commonwealth is a society of individuals each living his or her own life with the maximum of freedom, but regulating their conduct with other individuals in accordance with laws designed to protect each from oppression or abuse, individualism, and individual initiative, is the very foundation of British character. People believe in it with a passionate conviction and the working man himself is the first to resent the interference of the State. Neither Socialism nor Communism will ever succeed in the English speaking world, even though experiments made with the nationalization of certain monopolies, for business and similar reasons, may prove to be a success.

This does not mean that Capitalism is perfect. Far from it. But it does mean that, in fundamentals there is no alternative to private property and private enterprise. The truth of the matter would seem to be that what is wrong is not the system but the manner in which it is worked. It is rather like a government. In the old days before democracy had been found a practical success, despotisms produced strong anarchical governments. In their distress people thought that government was the evil, and that if only it could be abolished human beings would spontaneously be not only free, but orderly, self governed and happy. Experience dispelled the illusion of an evil, and showed that what was wanted was not no government, but good government. Then people set to work to improve the machinery and democracy was gradually evolved.

It is fundamentally the same with Capitalism. It is not the system which is wrong, but the way in which it is worked. Let us therefore examine for a moment where it has gone wrong, and that may point perhaps to the improvements possible in its working.

VII. The Failures of Capitalism.

If Capitalism has achieved very remarkable results and if Socialism and Communism are not alternatives, no one can pretend that the existing system has been an unmitigated success. It is not the mere rebelliousness of human nature which produces Labour unrest, not in one country alone but all over the world. It is that the working man recognizes that there is something wrong with the working of the capitalist system. It is not easy to define what that is, but the root of the trouble may perhaps be defined as follows. The capialist and employing classes as a whole have abused the power and privilege of their position, they have taken too much out of industry for themselves, and they have been terribly callous and indifferent to the well-being and happiness of the millions whom they have employed. Property rights have prevailed as against human rights.

(Continued next Week.)

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