

Why are we revolutionary?

The Reformer's "Case"

Probably few of our comrades have failed to meet the kind of working-man who cannot repress his disgust at the depravity of those of the working class who adopt an attitude of political antagonism to the heaven-appointed "classes" – the working-man who apes the nauseating mannerisms and shallow opinions of the middle class under the impression that it is "respectable" and "superior" to do so. Such superficial minds as our would-be superior friend fall an easy prey to the charlatan who devotes his energies to rounding up the workers to the support of middle class interests.

When such a "superior" person condescends to speak to the revolutionary Socialist, it is often to repeat, parrot like, the formulae: "Don't be ridiculously extreme and shout for the moon. You must be prepared to work with anybody who is going even a little way in your direction. It is nonsense to talk of revolution. You must work for Socialism in small doses, such as Nationalisation of the Land, Mines or Railways, or Work for the Unemployed; for these are practical steps of a ladder reaching to Socialism".

The answer to this parrot cry is not difficult, and need not be long. Rarely, however, can our opponents be got to discuss this important matter so we would fain do so here, the more readily since such an attitude toward Revolutionary Socialism is a very common one. It betrays a misconception of the meaning of the word "revolution", and an outlook upon political affairs that is by no means taken from the standpoint of the working-man's well-being; and this results from a blindness to the class structure of Society and to the real purpose of the "reforms" that are so loudly advocated.

The Judgment of History

In politics, owing to the diversity of interests which divides men into classes, it is safe to say that no change from one form of Society to another has been accomplished without a period of revolution. Russia to-day, in her transition from Feudal to Capitalist rule, is a modern example of the revolutionary period. Revolution, however, is not synonymous with bloodshed and disorder, (although owing to the blindness of vested interests they often go together), It means something quite distinct, to wit, the control of political power by a fresh class, whether accomplished peaceably or the reverse. It is of necessity a period of more than usually rapid change, for the new class immediately seek to use their newly acquired power for the purpose of bringing the political system more in accord with their own interests.

That which determines the directions of the various class interests, and in fact forms the basis of political Society, is the manner in which wealth is obtained and distributed; but the manner in which wealth is produced changes *gradually* along the line of least resistance, (in the direction of greater economy), and is in reality an *evolution* of industry, taking industry in its widest sense.

This changing industrial basis enables favourably situated groups (a class) to

command greater wealth, to become increasingly powerful, in short to become the “fittest” under the prevailing conditions. The warlike rulers of Ancient Society, the Patricians and slaveholders of Antiquity, and the Lords of Feudal Society, are examples of this, as are the capitalists of modern times.

Although a rising class becomes more and more powerful it is unable to make any deep and lasting impression to its advantage on the political affairs of a country until its power is greater than that of the hitherto ruling class; for the ruling class controls not only the making of laws but also the administration of the laws that are made.

In almost every instance the class suited to the outworn form of Society has clung tenaciously to power in face of the growing opposition. It has, aided by the advantage of possession, clung to its interests, to the spoils of power, in short to its existence as a class, until forcibly ejected by the more virile power beneath. Of this fact history gives repeated instances, at times as in the great French Revolution at one fell swoop, at others as during the English Rebellion and Revolution as the culmination of a series of more or less violent oscillations. In truth all history is the record of a series of class struggles thinly veiled.

Society’s Class Structure

The importance of a recognition of this class structure of Society can hardly be over-estimated, for it alone can keep the working-man’s policy clear and show him the way to his complete emancipation.

Upon the basis of the class struggle the policy of reform pedlars and sentimentalists stands condemned, because it is obvious that the ruling class can, and will always so long as they rule, thwart the aspirations and interests of the class upon which they live. The ruling caste can and will by their control of legislation and administration prevent the people’s will being done in any particular that clashes with the interests of the master class. The only hope of the people is to dislodge their oppressors.

We see, then, that the revolution is the culmination of evolution; the landmark, as it were, in the evolution of Society. Taken in its broad aspect the revolutionary method is seen to be logical, and when contrasted with the methods of the reformer who seeks Socialism on the instalment plan, this fact is made still more striking.

Reforms intensify Unemployment

Let us by analysis of a typical radical reform or two show what is meant. The panacea of Railway Nationalisation is an example to hand. The annual waste of separate railway management and working in this country is estimated at £30,000,000. Nationalisation would therefore, in addition to other economies considerably reduce the amount of labour (number of workmen) required to work the railways. Not only would it cause the discharge of those required to run the superfluous trains now running (through the waste of competition) nearly empty to many towns, but even though by reduction of tariff extra business were attracted to the railways, it would mean the discharge of those working the other means of transport thereby out-competed. Nationalisation of the Railways under capitalist rule will therefore tend to

increase the unemployed and to intensify competition on the labour market. It is a reform that may safely be left to capitalist interests. It is an advance in organisation and economy obviously, – for the master class; and so long as the workers are a subject class the benefits of the inevitable improvements in organisation, efficiency and economy, will go to their masters. It is by no means our purpose to oppose reforms, but to show that the workers can only derive benefit therefrom when they control political power. Under capitalism, profits would be made for Bondholders and in relief of capitalist taxes by such reforms as Railway Nationalisation, whilst the workers would be more under control of the capitalists united in government as in Germany and Austria.

The same applies to most municipal and national monopolies under the present *regime*. Their object is to save rates and taxes and to economise “labour”. Like the Trusts (to which they are placed in apparent opposition) they represent economic advance, and like them also they are intended to enable sections of the ruling class to extract more wealth from the labour of the people. And it is this that is the secret of the advocacy of these “reforms” by the bureaucrats and ratepayers of the middle class.

We cannot stem, and have no wish to stem, the march of economic progress, but we are forced to recognise the unpleasant fact that so long as capitalists control the State every increase in industrial organisation and economy renders the workers more redundant and their existence more precarious; and this unpleasant fact provides at once the necessity and the stimulus for our revolutionary propaganda.

The reformer, denying the class struggle, mistakes the progressive organisation of production for the progressive improvement in the lot of the working class, and ignores the fact that the fruits of organised production are denied to the wage-slaves until they emerge victorious from that very class struggle.

Land and mine nationalisation are also mentioned as “reforms” to benefit the workers, forsooth. But again it is the Bondholder, the Landowner and, perhaps, the Capitalist Farmer who would benefit, while the labourer remains a slave with his wage kept down by competition as now. And even if he could hire land cheaply from the Government he would be utterly unable to compete with organised capital at home and abroad.

The “Right to Work” Farce

Then we come to what is perhaps the most fatuous of all the reform cries: “Work for the Unemployed”. The unemployed can never be abolished under capitalism, as every Socialist is aware. The progressive displacement of the workman by the machine must continue and the capitalist could not, if he would, prevent it. A reserve army of labour is necessary to provide for the expansion of production in times of good trade; and, in times of bad trade, when every capitalist feels how necessary it is to keep down expenses, the unemployed are a godsend to him, for they enable him to reduce the wages of those in work.

Let our reformers try to imagine what would happen if there were no unemployed.

Instead of men undercutting one another to gain employment we should have employers bidding against each other for additional workmen. Just imagine a strike taking place with none to take the place of the strikers! One has visions of the re-enactment of the Statute of Labourers, of profits vanishing, wages rising, and capitalists working for a living!

The master class realise this to the full and will never even attempt to solve the unemployed problem. They will promise, and give a few crumbs in charity, or exploit a few of the out-of-works by setting them to useful work at half the usual rates, but – give work to all? Never! Their very existence depends upon it.

The abolition of the unemployed is a “reform” that it will require a social revolution to accomplish.

The Revolutionary Method vindicated

The great problem would, however, be *untouched* by the majority of the reforms proposed. Various sections of the exploiting class would benefit, but, even though these reforms were inscribed upon the tablets of the law, the workers would remain competitive wage slaves and a subject class. We have always to remember that all energy spent on these side issues is lost to the great movement forward. The working class have their own battle to fight in unconfusing opposition to the interests arrayed against them, to the end that production organised now by Company, Trust, and State may be then co-ordinated and controlled by and for those who produce the wealth; in order that improvements in production may lighten the worker’s burden instead of throwing him out of work or intensifying his toil; in order that an increase in productivity may increase his wealth instead of glutting a market and starving his family. But this Industrial Democracy is a possibility only when the capitalist class have ceased to rule the State. Hence the class struggle is the greatest struggle, and the revolutionary method the only correct one.

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