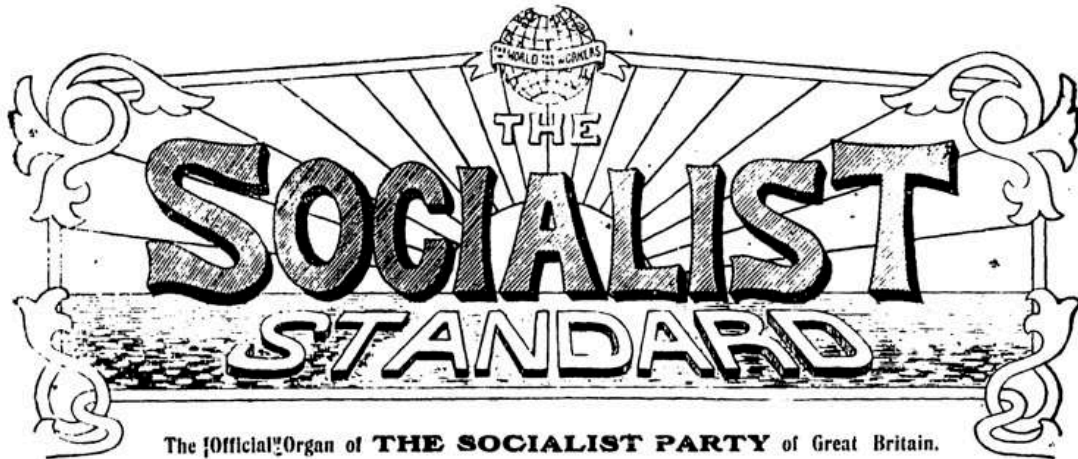


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[MONTHLY, ONE PENNY.]

HOPE AND FEAR:

A PHILOSOPHOLOGUE.

Is a collection of sermons issued something like a generation ago, entitled "Is Life Worth Living?" Dr. Clifford, the Baptist divine, used these words (pp. 3-4, 7th ed.) :

"It is not altogether a satisfactory social symptom that such a question has urged itself forward into our discussions in these later years. When a man begins to listen to the beatings of his heart, or asks the physician to apply the stethoscope to test the motions of his lungs, it is very likely there is something wrong with him. . . . And when men coldly speculate as to whether 'life is worth living,' we may be sure that is envious of a wide-spread despair of the means of human satisfaction."

Coming from a professional optimist these words are significant, and thirty years have added to rather than detracted from the force of their application. Well might we ask the hackneyed question when millions of the "youth and hope" of civilization rush in frenzy into the jaws of death. Bright indeed is the philosophy that can carry us in confidence through a reign of terror.

Optimism or pessimism, which? To the average mind to-day, nurtured in metaphysical habits of thought (glossed over, may be, by the superficial "dialectics" of the modern idealist school) there appears to be no alternatives. But these, according to which either Good or Evil (note capitals) are predominant in human affairs and the universe generally. So it is that, when the monstrous fantasies on which we are from childhood invited to build our hopes have been dispelled by ruthless experience. There seems nothing left but blank despair in the face of overwhelming circumstances—unless in the process of disillusionment new habits of mind have been acquired, and the facts of life more deeply analysed.

Optimism is defined by the dictionary as "the doctrine that everything is ordered for the best"; but what is "the best"? And what power is capable of ordering "everything" therefore? Any real standard of "good" or "the best" must be relative to certain particular circumstances of some particular person or person; and as there are fundamental differences in the circumstances of various persons, so there are radical distinctions in views of what is good or otherwise. To a firm of armament manufacturers war is a blessing; to countless working-class households it is a source of deepest misery. Almighty, indeed, must be the power which can reconcile this contradiction alone, to omit the mention of innumerable others.

There are, of course, people capable of asserting that in the Divine plan of existence the experience of the sufferers is of inestimable moral value; others even go the length of deeming it purely illusory—a figment of carnal sense. But

it is a curious fact that the said sufferers seem to be the last to appreciate these spiritual truths. Shortage of provisions produces an unequivocally painful sensation in the alimentary canal while so sentimental are some humans that the sight of a relation named, or the knowledge of his death, is even known to cause unbidden tears to rise.

Nevertheless we are told that "It is easy enough to be happy when life goes along like a song; but the man worth while is the man who will smile when everything goes dead wrong." Unable to destroy the popular consciousness of evil, optimists profess to regard the deliberate cultivation of cheerfulness as a virtue. Carrying this mental attitude to its logical conclusion, the working class should grin at a colliery explosion or a railway smash, and find a source of amusement generally in the myriad every-day afflictions the existing order of things compels them to bear. Indeed, the only form of optimism which recognises the necessity of providing something more than this absurdity for working class supporters is the frankly religious, which offers death as the true solution of all human woes. For of God and Immortality we can know nothing until we are stripped of the limitations of mortal sense, and in these alone, according to the creed, is happiness possible. "All's well that ends well," says the old saw, and assuming the truth of supernatural creeds any amount of suffering is simply part of the Divine plan of ordering everything for the best.

This brings us to a consideration of pessimism. The advance of modern science has had a two-fold effect. On the one hand it has vastly increased the poverty of the producing class and the wealth of those who own the improved means of wealth production; on the other it has destroyed to a large extent the hold upon the mass of society of the supernatural creeds, which, as above indicated, "justify" the optimistic view of life. Hence with "this world" getting more unsatisfactory and "the next" vanishing into thin air, there has arisen a systematic philosophy of unbelief and despair.

That it is not popular with the ruling class is due to two causes: first, it contradicts their experience of life; secondly, it is, at least implicitly, a condemnation of capitalism. A closer examination of pessimism, however, shows it to be based upon the same sort of illusion as optimism, i.e., the attribution of universality and absolute permanence to a tendency which is only characteristic of certain peculiar conditions in time and space.

Because there are external forces whose operations, at present uncontrolled by society, work havoc in the lives of the greater part of mankind, it is fallaciously assumed that this always has and always will be the case. According to this creed, the human race is in the grip

of a relentless Fate, whether personal or otherwise we know not, which automatically shatters every hope and nicks at all efforts. Yet the very process of scientific progress in industry gives the lie to this gloom which it produces. It is human genius that brings into being the contrivances for controlling and adapting the forces of nature to human ends. Blind Fate cannot resist the ever-increasing encroachment of the torch of knowledge, and once the laws of the operations of the external forces are correctly understood it is but a step to the use of these forces. Harmony with one's environment is the source of happiness; the free and successful exercise of the faculties forms every joy. In so far, then, as the mass of mankind, i.e., the working class, find "life a burden," we must seek the cause in some antagonism between their desires and the conditions wherein they are expected to satisfy them.

The first and fundamental desire of mankind, the working class included, is food. Activity demands energy, which in turn requires raw material. The source of raw material is external nature, but man's environment to-day by no means consists of nature, pure and simple. Social man has built up an intricate web of objects which are, in a sense, extensions of his faculties for obtaining sustenance from nature means of production, social organs.

This half-human, half-natural development has its own laws which must be understood by mankind before their action can be directed to the advantage of all. Otherwise our creation will be our master—in fact, this is exactly the position at the present day. The working class have developed the means of production, but the control thereof is not theirs. The sciences of nature and of man as independent objects have become widely understood, but the science of man's adaptation of nature has yet to be mastered by the bulk of mankind to whom it matters.

It follows from the fact that while the forces of nature exist from time immemorial, the specific economic forces have only within recent years reached maturity. The past two centuries have witnessed an enormous change in the scale of man's control of nature. Production has become manifestly social in character, but as yet mankind blinks the fact, and makes no attempt to control production on scientific, i.e., social, lines. Private property in the means of production, a survival of the petty, immature stage of economic development, causes the social nature of these things to manifest itself through competition, with the result that a few climb up on the backs of the many, turning the very scale of production against the producers, filling their own laps with every luxury and reducing their fellows to poverty.

Thus the working class cannot satisfy a single

Thursday, 1 July 1915

Editorial: Circumstances alter cases

Probably no newspaper carried on a more vigorous campaign against the Red Peril, a year ago, than the "Daily Express." That the "Socialism" it attacked was, in the main, State Capitalism, is a fact which only adds piquancy to its present attitude.

Before dealing with that interesting phenomenon, however, it is necessary to point out once more that the difference between "State Socialism" and Socialism, is the difference between slavery and freedom for the workers. In the former, the elements of the new society are present, but until the workers own and control, all the benefit goes to the capitalists; overwork and poverty is the workers' only share. Until the proletariat have fought the class war to a successful conclusion, they are still the hirelings or wage slaves of a class of parasites. That is why the class struggle is the great Socialist principle, and that is what distinguishes us from the pseudo Socialists. Thus the development of large-scale industry, whether in trust or State, is but the economic basis of Socialism. It is the means which the working class triumphant must seize and utilise for the commonweal.

The "Express," however, used to call any form of State enterprise Socialism, and it is ludicrous to find that journal advocating the very thing that it formerly branded as the end of all things.

But let it speak for itself. In dealing with the war it said on June 19th:

"All that is required is an extension of the system which was applied to the railways as soon as war broke out. The railways were immediately taken over by the State. So smoothly do things run that we probably do not realise that to day every railway employee is a State employee paid by the State, and that every passenger travels as a passenger of the State, and pays his fare to the State. . . . The same principle must be applied to every other war industry with the smallest amount of delay for the period of the war. The larger industries, such as coal and shipping and the manufacture of general munitions, and the supply of the nation's food, must be taken over at once. The smaller industries must be absorbed by the State as occasion demands— for the term of the war."

Yet the "Express" used to say that what it now advocates was utterly impracticable, and the deadliest foe to efficiency ! It was said to be an impossibility for a government to take over and organise such vast and complex industries, yet no sooner does it become necessary to the interests of the master class than the thing is done, in the two vital industries, in the twinkling of an eye, while the "Express" barks for more. From an impracticable, hare-brained scheme it becomes an extremely practical necessity. From being a grave danger because it would inevitably foster inefficiency and cause waste, it becomes the sovereign way to increase efficiency and eliminate waste. Formerly, the absence of the vivifying breath of competition was said to mean industrial death; now competition is abolished in the vital industries because co-operation alone is life. Formerly the very basis of the British Empire was individual initiative and private enterprise; now the Empire is in danger because of the chaotic inefficiency of individual initiative and the utter failure of private enterprise—and to save the Empire these very things must be abolished in the most essential industries. Truly the right about face of the capitalist Press is remarkable, even for them. But wait! perhaps they have not yet done turning.

We used also to be told that Socialism menaced the liberty of the individual and meant the regimentation, the ticketing, the registration and State surveillance of the people. But even so, the objector was worrying himself unnecessarily, for it is certain that this "liberty," so far as the mass of the people are concerned, has been interned or repatriated ages ago; while with regard to the awful charge of wishing to label, control, and register men and women, well, the free born Briton has, for the past few rears, been undergoing a Prussianisation that bids fair to leave its prototype far in the

rear.

The workers were classified, ticketed, and docked, suffering pains in the pocket, in that great ninepence for fourpence swindle. Then the Defence of the Realm Act hit them below the belt. Next comes the Munitions Bill to give them a farther dig in the ribs, while close on its heels follows the National Register, with its questions, its penalties, and its precious certificate that is to certify our servitude.

It would be truly curious to find out what arguments the capitalists have left even against the bogey they label as Socialism. When their interests demand it they throw their arguments to the winds and lay bare the lying hypocrisy of their assertions. Circumstances, they urge, alter cases. Undoubtedly. And in this case the circumstances have shown that the helpless inefficiency and wasteful dishonesty of their boasted private enterprise is very much worse even than their capitalist State enterprise.

And where are those damnable frauds who professed to be opposed to Socialism because it menaced the liberty which was supposed to exist in this country, and which was dearer to these frauds than life itself? We have listened in vain for the protests against the Register, etc., by the Liberty and Property Defence League or any similar body. Those doughty champions of individual liberty in the Anti-Socialist Union who never tired of assailing us on the false ground that we advocate what the Government is now doing, are now silent and acquiescent.

The sad truth is that under cover of national necessity the chains of servitude are being fastened more firmly upon the limbs of the worker. Nevertheless there is no room for pessimism. Economic development proceeds apace. The ruling class, in the pursuit of its interests, refutes its own arguments, eats its own words, and, in very truth, helps dig its own grave. Socialism is ever more clearly demonstrated to be both possible and necessary. Every fresh phase of capitalism throws into relief the antagonism of classes, and indicates the need for the working class to become masters of the State, and use its supreme economic power for the liberation of human kind from wage slavery. And the day of that liberation may come sooner than we now dare to think.

Thursday, 1 July 1915

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