

The social revolution

If there is one thing the employing class is more afraid of than anything else it is the possibility of the workers accepting the idea embodied in the term “the Social Revolution”. All the defenders of reaction, from Mallock to Bernstein, from Balfour to Ramsay Macdonald, from the leading reviews to the gutter Press, strain every nerve to uproot the idea of a sudden, complete, and drastic change in society. Revolution is anathema to them all. Revolutionists are, by such, described as wild visionaries, Utopia builders, and so on.

Before we investigate this charge it is necessary to point out that some who adopt the revolutionary label quite merit the above description. Those, for instance, who spend their time inventing industrial structures out of thin air, to be ready when the whistle blows to carry on production, undoubtedly belong to this category. So do those misguided individuals who unhappily labour under the delusion that they are Socialists, while employing their energies in advocating anything from Home Rule for Ireland to a municipal income tax—the latest thing in BSP novelties.

It is customary for this latter type to terminate their conference proceedings with cheers for the Social Revolution, though most of them have not the faintest idea of what it means. But they should not be blamed for this, for they are so occupied with other matters that they have not had the time, even if they have the inclination, to find out. It should, however, be distinctly understood that these people are not revolutionaries, even though they masquerade as such; it should be clearly realised that they belong, in fact, to the opposite camp. The term “revolutionist” can only be properly applied to those who work consistently and intelligently for the Social Revolution.

The SPGB alone fills this requirement.

By the term “Social Revolution” we mean a revolution in, and of, society. Any upheaval which merely replaced one set of masters with another would not be a social revolution, because the same social system would continue to prevail. We claim that a complete social change from private ownership to common ownership is necessary, because so long as private ownership continues the robbery of the workers for the benefit of the owners will continue and increase. We can see great national, and even international, trusts and combines springing up and flourishing; and we recognise that these great trusts that encompass continents use their immense powers for one purpose and one purpose alone, viz, to obtain profit. These great combines engage whole staffs of highly qualified men whose business is to devise ways and means of cutting down expenses, cheapening production, and securing a bigger annual return. Their specialised “feed and speed” men are continually at work putting the toilers at high pressure speed, and ever increasing that pressure under pain of losing their own jobs.

It is the workers who suffer by this process every time. In the nature of things the workers’ position must become worse, and not all the wailing of the sentimental reformer will alter this while the system remains and the financiers have the power.

The plight of the non-revolutionary aspirant for better conditions for the workers is pitiable when we contrast his puny, misdirected efforts with the mammoth forces of capital. These great financiers are like hideous leeches clinging to the bodies of the workers, and draining them of their last drop of blood, their last ounce of vitality. It makes no difference to them whether their income is derived from blood-stained rubber in Peru or cheap bibles in Britain. To appeal to their sentiment is useless—the only way is to destroy their power. That means revolution; it also means common sense.

Every day fresh industrial developments serve to show more clearly the correctness of the Socialist solution. The linking up of the great carrier concerns like Pickford's, Carter Paterson's, and the London Parcels Delivery Co, show the trend of modern industry. By joining forces these three firms will be able to do away with the competition of three vans over the same area. By substituting for the old horse vans, motor lorries, which carry more goods and travel quicker, a great saving of labour can be effected, which means that a large number of carmen get the "sack". Clerical workers must also go when there is only one office instead of three, and the work is simplified by being brought under one head. These workers are slung out into the streets to scramble for a job.

Is there any suspicion of dreamland about these plain, brutal facts? Yet what is there that can cope with the trouble except the destruction of the capitalist system and the establishment of Socialism? Those who work for the Social Revolution have no need to draw on their imaginations for a case: they have plenty of material at hand.

So long as industry is run on the "Will it pay?" principle, so long will the workers be subject to the ever-increasing application of the screw. Nothing can avail them except to run industry on an entirely different principle.

Instead of "Will it pay?" being the sole consideration, the test of worth must be: "Will it benefit the community?"

That test cannot be applied until the community ceases to be two warring classes with opposing interests, and becomes a social organisation where common interest prevails because it is based upon the unifying principle of common ownership of the means of life.

Before industry can be run on other than a profit-making basis, however, the workers must get the power into the hands of their class. Crystallised, the position is this—the first step toward working-class freedom, toward the escape of the toilers from their ever-increasing degradation, must be the raising of the working class to the position of the ruling class in society. Our educational work is carried on so that the workers may gain the knowledge to enable them to take that step.

We recognise that side by side with the development of capitalism and conditioned by that development, is evolving the instrument for its overthrow, viz, a revolutionary working class. There is the revolutionary force making for the disintegration and overthrow of capitalism, and the reactionary force making for its retention. To-day the reactionary force is the stronger; it controls the central power—Parliament, around which the struggle for supremacy rages.

But its power is on the wane. Gradually—too gradually—the revolutionary force grows, each accession of strength meaning a corresponding reduction on the other side. As the workers grow conscious of their interest, the time will approach when the revolutionary minority will become a majority. The time must come when the power will pass from the hands of the employing class into those of the workers. As both classes cannot hold power at the same time, a definite break must take place. Either that or the employing class is destined to rule for ever. The necessity for, and the inevitability of, the Social Revolution is simply a matter of logical deduction from fact.

With the passing of political power into the hands of the working class the death knell of capitalism will be sounded. The mere fact that the revolutionary delegates would refuse to safeguard commercial interests or to carry on delicate diplomatic negotiations for the financiers would cause the system of private ownership to break down. The capitalist system cannot continue when the revolutionary workers hold the political power.

No “Labour” Government could rule under capitalism without making itself the slave of commercial interests at home and abroad. Those individuals who picture a working-class administration under capitalism cautiously and tentatively experimenting in social legislation while the employing class remains dominant in the industrial field, are the real visionaries.

Capitalism cannot do without political control. Your “Labour” Government could only exist within the present system by helping to run the system. The capitalists would still rule, as they do in Australia under the “Labour” label.

Real working-class political control would mean that not only would the workers’ representatives refuse to act as tools in financial intrigues, but they would take the positive step of dispossessing the employing class of its ill-gotten wealth. Political control would be the fore-runner of economic control.

The foregoing is the broad outline of what we mean by the Social Revolution—the details will be determined by circumstances. Do you wonder that the ruling class oppose it? It is unfortunate for them, however, that they have no other remedy to offer for the social evils, which tend to increase rather than diminish, and that they are forced to voice their opposition in such a foolish, futile way.

Instead of Socialism being impracticable, it is clear to anyone who takes the trouble to investigate the facts, that the Socialist remedy is based on knowledge, and that the Social Revolution will come in spite of the howl set up by its enemies.

R. Fox

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