

The ABC of Socialism

(October 10, 1902)

Terre Haute, Ind., Oct. 10, 1902.

To lift the working class everywhere from the dead level of wage bondage to the exalted plane of freedom, dignity, and self-control is the prime purpose of the central object of the international socialist movement.

To attain this end the methods pursued and relied upon are based not upon speculation in human goodness or utopian dreams but upon the results of the most searching scientific inquiry which has stood the test of 50 years of industrial and social development.

Socialism is the science of modern free society, based upon cooperative industry, administered in the equal interest of all without a trace of slavery to breed resentment or mar the progressive social order.

Socialism a Modern Institution

Socialism, the product of industrial evolution, is of necessity a modern institution. I could not have existed in ancient or medieval times. Certain conditions, the outgrowth of successive changes in the modes of production, had to precede it and as these appeared socialism had its inception, and as the evolution continued the socialist movement spread and struck deeper its roots, until today it numbers millions of adherents and constitutes the most powerful economic organization and the greatest political party on earth.

Let us first consider the industrial society in which socialism had its origin. This had existed under varying conditions since the overthrow of the feudal system and was based upon small production, by hand labor with primitive tools. The young man was apprenticed to the master and learned his trade. He was then upon the same footing with his previous "boss" and could compete with him and all others upon equal terms. Why? Because, like his boss, he was the master of the tools of his trade. They were simple, cheap, could be operated by himself alone, could not be monopolized, and he could buy a set of his own. With these he could employ

himself, what he produced was his own, and unless he preferred idleness to labor he could live in comparative comfort and his family need never know the scourge of want.

The very nature of the tools then in use, which always determine the mode of production, precluded monopoly, and the competitive industrial system was developed to its full and final limitations. Let it be recorded that during the prevalence of this system in America there was not a plutocrat and not a tramp—that these words were not in the dictionaries of the day. Let it also be understood that the system in which the one is possible makes the other inevitable.

There was no wage slavery in that time. One man worked for another, not in selfish dependence, but to learn the trade that he, too, might become its master and compete in the open field, without favors, for his share of the social patronage.

In this form of competition all men had approximately an equal chance and not one could be excluded from its privileges or denied its opportunities.

But the results of this competitive era in society at large were not calculated to make it an age of progress, of culture or civilization. The workers were isolated from each other, they had to labor early and late, and as it required about all their time and energy to produce enough to feed and clothe and shelter themselves, the selfish, rather than the social, instincts of the race were cultivated; there was no great wealth, nor much art, a low average of intellectual culture, and anything but a high order of civilization.

Through all this period of industrial competition, based upon hand labor and individual tools, socialism, the germ it contained, was latent, awaiting to spring forth when by the magic touch of evolution the conditions should develop to necessitate its introduction in the unfolding of industrial life and the evolution of mankind from the sordid and groveling haunts of competitive isolation to the higher and holier planes of mutual endeavor, fellowship, freedom, peace, and joy.

The Modern Industrial Revolution

In the struggle for individual existence, competition between man and man gradually became keener. New and improved methods of production

were sought by the more enterprising and progressive to enable them to keep the lead of their fellows.

The inventive genius of man was appealed to and the power of steam as a motive and propelling agency was discovered and developed and applied to industry. The modern industrial revolution had its inception in the results of these discoveries.

The old hand tool was enlarged and transformed. It was stripped of its individual characteristics and grew into a complex machine which, charged with the vitalizing current, throbbed with life and proclaimed the ultimate emancipation of the world's workers from the industrial bondage of the ages.

The productive capacity of labor was increased to a marvelous degree, the small shop gave way to the great factory, the concentration of capital inevitably following, and the whole system was transformed from the competitive to the cooperative mode of production. Wealth could now be produced in abundance for all; but the workers had lost their tools, and the wealth now created was for their masters and not for them. The old tools became worthless, while the machines were owned by the capitalists, who had supplanted the small employers and were not promoting production and the sale and distribution of commodities for profit for themselves, buying the labor-power of the working class as they needed it in the open market at the prevailing competitive prices.

Labor-power was reduced to a commodity and henceforth "free" labor must seek a bidder and find a purchaser.

Capitalist production now prevailed and the "labor market" was and is in full operation.

Doom of the Old System

Capitalists upon the one hand, workers upon the other, the former having the machinery, buying the labor-power to operate it, and therefore owning the product. Result: a few millionaires and a vast army of poverty-stricken, degraded, and servile toilers. These conditions are practically the same in all nations throughout the civilized world.

The greatest class struggle in all history is approaching its culmination.

The tool-using workers and the tool-owning capitalists are in deadly economic conflict. The battlefield is the earth; the stake is universal freedom.

The slave pen and auction block had to go. The “labor market” will soon follow to share in their eternal infamy.

Seemingly oblivious of their impending doom the capitalists are capitalizing and centralizing. Competitive small capital is being converted into collective great capital. The economic foundation of the middle class is crumbling and they are sinking to the level of the working class.

Thus the capitalists are busily engaged in paving the way to their own overthrow. In combining and crushing out competition they are preparing industry for social ownership and recruiting the propertyless class whose salvation will depend upon and necessitate it.

Every system of society having fulfilled its historic mission develops the class whose interest compels them to abolish that system.

The capitalist system is rapidly approaching that point. Another panic — and the next will be international in scope and unparalleled in severity — is apt to precipitate the crisis. It is bound to come. The impoverished workers of all nations produce immeasurably more than their “labor market” competitive wage will permit them to consume. The widespread introduction of machinery and consequent competition of men, women, and children force the wage to the level of subsistence, and this measures the limited share of his product which the wage slave may consume. The home market is more and more restricted. The foreign market now becomes supremely important. Capitalist politicians glorify it and capitalist governments fight for it. Every now and then this market, into which all nations pour their mighty flood of surplus, fills up, congests, and the reaction that follows proceeds the business panic, industrial paralysis, stagnation, bankruptcy, tramps, misery, and suffering beyond the power of pen or voice to describe.

Another panic or two and the capitalist system will have wound up its affairs and the exploited wage workers and propertyless class, keenly conscious of their class identity and class interests, representing an overwhelming majority of the people, will stand ready to step into power, to assume control of industry, and proclaim the socialist republic.

Many a man now sneering will then be cheering for socialism, and many a one now asking “How will you do it?” will then be at his post doing his share to inaugurate the reign of freedom, harmony, and love.

The Social Revolution

To achieve this end involves a social revolution. The lands and their resources and the machinery of production must become the property of the collective people.

This is the pith and core of the socialist agitation and the tendency of all the forces of evolution. There can be no shadow of doubt about it. The modern productive and distributive agencies, colossal, stupendous, yet withal cooperative and interdependent, defy the blasphemy of puny private ownership. The millions are required to produce and operate them; the millions only have the right to own them. Transferred to their rightful masters, they cease to oppress the children of toil; they fulfill their historic mission and free the race.

To make the means of production collective property, the only possible solution of the problem, the working class, as such, must secure control of government. Then only can it assert its mastery, proclaim its power, and execute its will.

This is why the class struggle is a political struggle and why the lines must be shaped and uncompromisingly drawn between the Socialist Party, representing the exploited working class, and all others, including "reform" parties, that represent the exploiting capitalist class.

The working man and woman who are capable of developing a clear economic thought must perceive that socialism alone promises relief from the despotic and grinding exactions of the present system. Let them take counsel of their own enlightened self-interest and they will at once desert the pirate crew of capitalism and take their places in the ranks of the class-conscious proletariat whose tramp is even now heard round the world.

No Doubt, Nor Dread, Nor Fear

Day by day new accessions are swelling the movement. Its members everywhere are alert, vigilant, and aggressive. They do not doubt, nor dread, nor fear. Grounded in the bedrock principles of modern socialism they wait and watch and work in the full faith that the Socialist Party will finally conquer in the political struggle and secure to the collective people all the means of wealth production, thus achieving industrial democracy and inaugurating the socialist commonwealth.

Published as “ABC of Socialism—No. 7,” part an ongoing series, in *The Socialist* [Seattle], whole no. 116 (Oct. 26, 1902), p. 1. Editorial headings generated by editor Hermon Titus have been modified and rationalized.