The Social Revolution

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY LOUIS C. FRAINA AT BERKELEY LYCEUM HALL, NEW YORK CITY, DECEMBER 12, 1909. : : : : :

Workingmen and Workingwomen:

The fact of your attending a Socialist meeting denotes that you are either avowed Socialists, or else dissatisfied with existing conditions, and anxious for a method of escape from the life-stifling grasp of adverse economic conditions. Logically enough, the thought lies in your mind as to whether Socialism has a real solution for the social problem confronting us at the present time; whether Socialism is a movement based on scientific deductions from social conditions, or whether it is another of those fanciful Utopias that have come and gone—a mere *ignis fatuus* of the human mind.

It will be my task to try and demonstrate to you that Socialism, as a philosophy, has nothing in common with the various Utopias of the past; that their only point of similarity lies in the object to be attained—emancipation for the human race. It will be my task to demonstrate that the Socialist movement is based on the firm rock of economic reality, and that its ideal of human emancipation has a material basis for its realization.

The effort to attain a perfect, an ideal social organization has, since the dawn of imaginative intellectual activity, occupied the time and energy of the noblest of the human race. Suffering humanity, steeped in ignorance and misery, has always looked for hope and comfort to a happy vision of the future, to a state of society wherein all would be assured happiness and plenty, war be a phantom of the past, and "swords be turned into plow-shares anl spears into pruning hooks." While with many this ideal has been a chaotic one, an aspiration vague and indefinite, others have given attention to evolving a system of society that would make possible the realization of this ideal. This has given birth to divers schemes for reorganizing society, ranging from the "Republic" of Plato and the "Utopia" of More, to the sentimental aspirations and schemes of the Utopian Socialists.

The French Materialists of the eighteenth century, (who were the intellectual precursors of the French Revolution) belied their name, demonstrating their metaphysical taint, when they, also, sought to realize this ideal vision. The means they considered necessary was a "perfect legislation," not *the best legislation applicable to given conditions*, but a *perfect one*, that should insure to all human beings freedom and happiness. The principle from which these "Materialists" started was the abstract one of human nature: man seeks happiness and freedom: he is a "reasonable" being, and once you demonstrate that your conclusions are based on reason, are incontrovertible, his reasoning faculty and desire for happiness will induce him to accept your plans for realizing an ideal society. Reasoning from this premise, these philosophers evolved ideal methods of legislation. But these thinkers, in their moments of lucidity, abandoned their abstract principle of human nature in general, and substituted, unconsciously, as a result of their evironment, the idealized nature of a man of the "Third Estate" (tiers etat) in its stead. Consequently, this aspiring after a "perfect legislation" crystallized after the Revolution into something different from the ideals of the philosophers. The immediate aftermath of the Revolution was the despotic reign of Napoleon Bonaparte, who ruthlessly curbed the revolutionary portion of the Working Class, but who, nevertheless, in spite of his autocratic and bloody rule, performed a useful historic mission in that he cleared Europe of huge boulders of feudalism, paving the way for the more complete development of Capitalism. The "kingdom of reason" was ushered in as the new bourgeois society, based on bourgeois property; the "Social Contract" of Rousseau became a bourgeois republic; the "freedom" so loudly proclaimed by the revolutionists came into being as that eminently bourgeois principle, the "freedom of trade"; and the "rights of man" culminated in bourgeois equality before the law,—an empty mockery to those men and women bereft of material economic power, and subservient for a livelihood to the economic masters of society.

The Utopian Socialists of the early part of the nineteenth century, whose nature revolted against the misery attendant upon machine production and the development of Capitalism, reasoned from premises similar to the premises of the French Materialists. They also started from the abstract principle of human nature, or some abstract idea derived therefrom, and sought to organize society in harmony with it. They also appealed to the "reason" of mankind, and sought to enlist the sympathy of all "good friends of humanity" by demonstrating the incontrovertible nature of their ideas; and this was done by organizing miniature plans of the future society—the numerous crop of so-called "Socialist" colonies.[1]

All these efforts were necessarily doomed to failure. Human nature is not the cause but an effect of historical development; it is not eternal and unchangeable, but varies according to the material environment in which men live. Hence to appeal to human nature and seek to reorganize society accordingly, is like unto the useless efforts of a dog howling at the moon. Society is not amenable to change at the vagaries of any and all individuals; it develops obedient to certain laws, and the aim of the revolutionist should be, not mapping out ideal systems of social organization, but *to study the laws that underly the development of society*, and to act accordingly.

This is the basis of modern scientific Socialism: it has grasped the laws of social development, and its aims, its aspirations, are to be achieved as the result of the working of these laws. Socialism cannot be regarded as a scheme—as a Utopia of some doctrinaire philosopher, who seeks

> "To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
> To shatter it to bits—and then
> Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire."

Socialists are no longer tinged with the Utopianism that characterized the "Socialism" of Robert Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon, who hoped to abolish the misery and degradation of the Working Class by a sentimental appeal to the reason and good hearts of all "friends of humanity," who, once shown the beauties of Communism, were to unite and usher in the new society, irrespective of what their class interests might be. The Socialism that is potent at the present time is of the school of Marx; and the distinctive feature of Marxian philosophy is that it is supremely practical, materialistic and scientific. Socialism is all this, not only because it adopts a scientific method of investigation, but because it bases itself on the firm rock of material reality. The hope of success that inspires the Socialist is a product of the consciousness that his aspirations are in line with economic and social evolution; he conceives the Socialist Republic as a possibility on no other basis than as the resultant of the inherent forces of historical development. Socialism, therefore, does not seek to inaugurate the future society by organizing miniature Socialist Republics under Capitalism, and, by demonstrating their effectiveness and beauty, induce humanity to adopt the plan on a larger scale. We are no longer interested in organizing toy co-operative colonies and co-operative enterprises generally, which Marx so justly stigmatized as "movements which give up the task of revolutionizing the old world," and seek to emancipate the Proletariat "behind the back of society" (Eighteenth Brumaire). Socialism seeks to attain its end through social development; and this implies revolution—a *Social Revolution*.

The meaning of no term has been so misconstrued and so misunderstood as the meaning implied in the term "Social Revolution." The concept being contrary to existing interests and prejudices, the task has devolved upon the intellectual hirelings of the Capitalist Class of disseminating false information in regard to its true meaning. This has given birth to a goodly number of false conceptions of the Social Revolution. The notion that it would be the bloody result of a secret conspiracy of assassins has its roots in the denunciation of Socialists as lazy, incompetent malcontents, who covet the wealth of the industrious, demanding an equal division of social wealth, and stand ready to enforce their demands with the cowardly weapons of the assassin. As Socialist agitation and education become more widely diffused, however, this error which attributes revolutions to the ill-will of a few agitators rapidly disappears. People then grasp the scientific truth that "whenever there is a revolutionary convulsion, there must be some social want in the background, which is prevented, by out-worn institutions, from satisfying itself. The want may not be felt as strongly, as generally, as might insure immediate success; but every attempt at forcible repression will only bring it forth stronger and stronger, until it bursts its fetters." (Karl Marx, in "Revolution and Counter-Revolution," Sonnenschein edition, page 2.)

What is meant by the term "Social Revolution"? Marx, in his "Critique of Political Economy" defines Social Revolution as a change in the economic foundations of society and the birth of a new social system, the subsequent result of which is the more or less rapid transformation of the "entire immense superstructure" of social, political and juridical institutions. A social Revolution is always, necessarily, the work of a hitherto subject class casting off the yoke of its economic oppressor, and whose class interests dictate the change that gives birth to the new social system.

The Social Revolution of our Age, accordingly, implies the casting off by the present subject class—the Proletariat—of its yoke of economic oppression, and the birth of a new social system, the Socialist Republic. This may or may not entail the shedding of blood, according to how determined the Capitalist Class will be in resisting the execution of its doom, and the degree of strength and efficiency attained by the organized Working Class.

The Social Revolution is not a bolt from a clear sky; it is, essentially, an evolutionary manifestation.

Socialism is a theory of social and historical development, the logical culmination of which is the Socialist Republic; and the Socialist movement is, in its essence, "the direct product of the recognition . . . of the class antagonisms existing in the society of to-day, between proprietors and non-proprietors, between capitalists and wage-workers" (Engels).

The class struggle is a product of economic and social evolution.

Social Evolution—The Class Struggle.

Every ruling class has fondly cherished the delusion that its rule was of all time and for all time, eternal and unchangeable in the universal scheme of things. The fatuous motto of every ruling class and its economic system has been, *"Esto Perpetua"*—"For all Eternity." Social science has rendered this myth untenable; it has demonstrated that in the social relations and institutions of the human race there is nothing immutable, everything is subject to a constant process of change. Man did not make his appearance on earth in an advanced stage of civilization, capable of bending the elements to do him service; the human race has developed from forms lower in the scale of nature, a development that required ages for its consummation. Man is a higher development from the brute animals; and just as there has been a development in the organic structure of the human race, there has been a similar development in its social environment.

After having got beyond the stage of the savage, living in caves and trees, primitive man realized that co-operation was a necessity to him. Instinctively, unconsciously, he grasped the important fact that he could gain a livelihood and fight his enemies with a larger measure of success by co-operating with others of his kind than he could by his individual efforts alone. The human race from the very earliest stages, accordingly, so soon as a large number of beings existed and descended from a common parent stock, collected in hordes for mutual protection. The *gens*, founded on blood relationship and consisting of men, women and children descended from the same mother, was the social basis of earliest society; this later developed into the *tribe*, consisting of a number of gentes united together by a real or imaginary tie of consanguinity. The type of social system evolved by our primeval ancestors was a crude, tribal communism. Within this society the means of making wealth, of livelihood, was in the hands of the whole tribe, and distribution was of a like social nature, in accordance with the needs of the various members of the community. "From each according to his deeds; to each according to his needs," was the tribal law. Though inter-tribal warfare was constant, instigated thereto by the scarcity of food, harmony reigned within the tribal-unit itself—co-operation, not conflict, was the polar-star of action.[2]

All the great fundamental inventions were evolved under this Primitive Communism. The wheel, the potter's wheel, the bow and arrow, the lever, the boat, the oar, the rudder, the sail, fire, weaving, building in wood and clay, as well as the cultivation of cereals for food, the domestication of animals and the smelting of metals were evolved under Primitive Communism in its various stages. The extreme importance of these ingenious inventions can scarcely be overestimated, as they constitute the foundation upon which is reared the structure of our elaborate modern industry.

Within this primitive communal society perfect democracy and equality reigned. Devotion to tribal interests was the only ethic; antagonism to tribal interests the only crime. Their instinctive motto, "All for each and each for all," caused the men and women to practice unconsciously the morality subsequently, and down to our own day, hypocritically preached but never practiced. Woman held a high position, the social equal of man—a status of pre-eminence and dignity, as is demonstrated by the unquestionable evidence of the "Mother-Right." The "government," or central directing authority, was democratically elected by the combined suffrage of men and women; its functions were to direct the co-operative efforts of the tribe to gain a livelihood, and in so doing it shared actively in production. There was absolutely no social coercion, inequality, or antagonism within primitive communal society.

The first incident to disturb this equality was the discovery of the process of smelting iron ore. The production of iron was an event of tremendous importance in human existence. Out of it came the metallic hammer and anvil, the axe and chisel, and the plow with an iron point. The appearance of the iron plow-share was the cause of a social cataclysm that rent communal society in twain. Prior to the production of iron and the appearance of the Iron Tool, agriculture, confined to a little patch of land around the spot where the tribe made its temporary home, had been in the hands of woman. With the appearance of the Iron Tool this was changed. The arduous strain incidental to the handling of the iron-pointed plow, a ponderous affair that required muscular strength to wield, and the added labor rendered necessary by the extension of agriculture, due to the utilization of iron in tilling the soil, required a degree of strength and time that woman did not possess. When agriculture had been in its horticultural stage, requiring little time and energy, woman was perfectly competent to manage it. But when the iron plow-share made its appearance, and agriculture developed, spreading over a large area, woman, due to her maternal functions of child-bearing, with the physiological strain and duties that that implies, was unequal to the demands of the new state of agriculture; she was forced to forego its management. Man, however, had the requisite strength and time to devote to the new form of agricultural activity; accordingly, agriculture, systematized and improved, passed into the control of the men, a majority of whom were powerful enough to wield the new iron plow; and who, by virtue of their possession of the preponderance of economic power, rose to a position of social pre-eminence. Thus was consummated the first division in communal society, woman, together with those of the males who were unable to wield the Iron Tool, losing her social status of equality and becoming subordinate.

The utilization of iron in tilling the soil, together with the increased domestication of animals thereby made possible, and the development of the various handicrafts, increased production to such an extent that it became relatively easy for man to produce more than was absolutely necessary for his own maintenance. Chattel slavery therefore made its appearance; for it now became more profitable to retain prisoners of war as slaves, working for their masters' interest, instead of being killed and eaten, as had hitherto been the case. Slaves were, at first, the property of the tribe; but within the tribe itself, owing to the changed economic conditions, a profound change was going on that created a division between rich and poor. The men, anxious for ease and leisure, impossible while the communal system endured, began to extend their property at the expense of the community; the expansion of commerce, the building of cities, and the ever further introduction of slavery, gave an impetus to the rise of private property that could not be resisted. Man in primitive society seems to have sought to retard as long as possible the change in the direction of private property, and this development, though steady, was slow. This change was, nevertheless, inevitable in the upward and onward march of the race, and private property was eventually firmly established.[3]

Along with private property, class distinctions and class rule came into existence. Two economic classes confronted each other—the ruling class of property owners, and the ruled class of slaves and propertiless freemen; between these two classes a struggle, a *class struggle*, was inevitable. The laws that underlie the existence and development of private property in the means of production and exchange dictate the inevitable result; the division of society into hostile economic classes with opposing interests, between whom is waged a struggle for social supremacy. The class struggle, with the antagonisms that it bred, rendered necessary a special instrument to maintain social equilibrium, insure the orderly movement of the social machinery, and keep the subject class, who, galled by the yoke of economic oppression, sought to cast it off, in passive submission while it was being robbed. This urgent need gave birth to "political government", the State, the product, accordingly, of private property and consequent class struggle and class rule; its functions were those of repression, keeping the ruled class quiet and bulwarking the economic interests of the ruling class.

From then on, the history of human society is the history of its class struggles,—the struggle between master and slave, exploiter and exploited, who "carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes" (Communist Manifesto).

Since that primeval revolution which overthrew the Communal system, society in its development has been convulsed by violent upheavals; and these disturbances present, to the uncritical mind (of such is the bourgeois historian) an aspect of mere chaos and turmoil. To the Socialist it is otherwise; the pregnant facts of Socialist science demonstrate that the historical development of society is a process governed by law, history thereby ceasing to be a meaningless mass of war and rapine, tyranny and cruelty, kingly amours and kingly foibles, and becoming a coherent whole. Man is a tool-using animal; the various stages in the development of the tool of production, the weapon whereby man gains his livelihood, rising above the savage conditions of brute existence, mark the great epochs in the upward and onward march of humanity. He who is deprived of the tool requisite to life is the slave of the class equipped therewith. The private ownership of the tool of production, therefore, divides society into economic classes,—the ruling class of tool-owners, and the ruled class of those who, being tool-less, are the economic dependents and slaves (economic dependence being the root of slavery), of the economic masters of society; and around the tool has raged, and still continues to rage, the social storm of class conflict. In the progress that marks the development of tools, a new and more fruitful method of economic production is evolved, t hat Revolution"—the extinction of a previously, and the rise of a new, ruling class, and the birth of a new social system. The basis of a ruling class is the ownership of the particular tool of production that, for the time being, is dominant in society; when a more powerful tool of production arises, it dictates the overthrow of the old ruling class; this is achieved by the class whose ownership of the more fruitful tool marks it as the new social ruler, whose class interests dictate the change that gives birth to the new social system, and which then assumes the reins of government. This economic revolution necessarily has its reflex in a change of the social, political and ethical institutions of the race. The upheavals that have marked the development of society are not a chaotic mass: they mark a progression of revolutions, and these social revolutions are the result of the economic relations existing in a given society and the class struggle flowing therefrom.

The Capitalist Revolution.

In the historical series of class struggles we encounter the struggle waged between the feudal lord and the bourgeoisie, the result of which was the overthow of Feudalism.[4]

In feudal society, the main class division was between the feudal lord and the serf. Their slavery a degrading one, their treatment brutal and oppressive, the feudal serfs from time to time made desperate attempts to cast off the tyrannical yoke of their masters, among the most notable being the Wat Tyler rebellion in England, the Jacquerie in France, and the Peasants' War in Germany. These revolts were sporadic, of comparatively little moment, and ended in being ruthlessly and bloodily suppressed.

The truly revolutionary force of the Age, destined to overthrow feudalism, was not the rebellious spirit implied in the struggles of the serfs, but the progress in the development of the means of production and exchange.

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[1] Luminous, and proof of their warped mentality, is the fact that the Anarchists, who prate so much of their "revolutionary" spirit, are akin to all the Utopians of the past. *"The Utopian is the one who, starting from an abstract principle, seeks for a perfect social organization"* (Plechanoff). The Anarchists start with the abstract principle of "human nature," eternal justice," "absolute freedom", "voluntary co-operation", "sovereignty of the individual" etc., according to the angle of their mental strabismus, and seek to organize society accordingly. The Anarchist does not realize that human freedom is predicated upon leisure for all, the absence of want, the fear of want and of economic oppression; that to attain this requires co-operation on a large scale, and thereby attain the highest efficiency in production; that this co-operation is made *compulsory* by the modern machine process; that this co-operation is so immense and complicated, and industry so inter-depedent, as to require a central directing authority, or "government", for its management.—The Anarchist is a mental antediluvian, who belongs to an intellectual stage in human development long since passed away.

[2] So imperative was this need of co-operation, of mutual aid, that for primitive man there was no existence outside the social existence of the group; and the most terrible punishment that could befall him was exile from the tribe, for this meant certain death. Cain, driven from his clan after the murder of Abel, laments: "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me from this land. I shall be a wanderer and fugitive over the earth, and it shall come to pass that whosoever findeth me shall slay me." (Genesis IV., 13, 14.)

[3] With the appearance of private property as a permanent institution the complete subjection of woman was accomplished, an impetus to which had been given by the Iron Tool. To woman's deprivation of social rights was coupled her infamous sex degradation. Now appeared historic monogamy, the rule of man over woman, adultery, hetaeraism, and its modern and more brutal complement, prostitution. All this followed as a result of private property, and the advocates of "Woman's Emancipation" should indelibly impress this historic fact on their mental scrolls. The subjection of woman is a crime of private property and consequent class rule, and is only endable, as ended it will be, by the Social Revolution.

[4] The first system of class society, chattel slavery, prevailed until the downfall of the Roman Empire, when it disappeared in the progressive part of the world to be succeeded by serfdom. The chattel slaves were rebellious at their yoke of servitude, and often rose in rebellion; the trail of ancient history is strewn with the corpses of the slave revolutionists. The overthrow of the social system of chattel slavery, however, was not due to the slaves' revolts; these may have helped, but the real factors were the disintegration of the economic structure of society; the decay of the great estates and the unprofitable nature that slave-labor now assumed, the slaves, consequently, being allowed to cultivate and live on small holdings of land; and the rise of a new, often alien, ruling class (the Gothic and other barbarian hordes). *Feudalism* was the new social system. The workers now became serfs, vassals of the feudal lord, who, in turn, was vassal to the king, a vassalage, however, more fictitious than real, the barons being practically independent of the king, often dictating to the latter, and the laborer, who could not leave the land on which he worked, was owned by the feudal lord through the latter's ownership of the land. The lot of the feudal serf was slightly better than that of the chattel slave. He had a settled home, could work part of the time for himself, and maintain family life. Otherwise, his oppression and slavery were as odious as had prevailed for his chattel slave predecessors.

(To be continued)

PLATFORM

Adopted at the National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party, July, 1904, and Re-adopted at the National Convention, July, 1908.

The Socialist Labor Party of America, in convention assembled, reasserts the inalienable right of man to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

We hold that the purpose of government is to secure to every citizen the enjoyment of this right; but taught by experience we hold furthermore that such right is illusory to the majority of the people, to wit, the working class, under the present system of economic inequality that is essentially destructive of THEIR life, THEIR liberty and THEIR happiness.

We hold that the true theory of politics is that the machinery of government must be controlled by the whole people; but again taught by experience we hold furthermore that the true theory of economics is that the means of production must likewise be owned, operated and controlled by the people in common. Man cannot exercise his right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness without the ownership of the land on and the tool with which to work. Deprived of these, his life, his liberty and his fate fall into the hands of the class that owns those essentials for work and production.

We hold that the existing contradiction between the theory of democratic government and the fact of a despotic economic system—the private ownership of the natural and social opportunities—divides the people into two classes: the Capitalist Class and the Working Class; throws society into the convulsions of the Class Struggle; and perverts government to the exclusive benefit of the Capitalist Class.

Thus labor is robbed of the wealth which it alone produces, is denied the means of self-employment, and, by compulsory idleness in wage slavery, is even deprived of the necessaries of life.

Against such a system the Socialist Labor Party raises the banner of revolt, and demands the unconditional surrender of the Capitalist Class.

The time is fast coming when in the natural course of social evolution, this system, through the destructive action of its failures and crises, on the one hand, and the constructive tendencies of its trusts and other capitalist combinations, on the other hand, will have worked out its own downfall.

We, therefore, call upon the wage workers of America to organize under the banner of the Socialist Labor Party into a class conscious body, aware of its rights and determined to conquer them.

And we also call upon all other intelligent citizens to place themselves squarely upon the ground of Working Class interests, and join us in this mighty and noble work of human emancipation, so that we may put summary end to the existing barbarous class conflict by placing the land and all the means of production, transportation and distribution into the hands of the people as a collective body, and substituting the Co-operative Commonwealth for the present state of planless production, industrial war and social disorder—a commonwealth in which every worker shall have the free exercise and full benefit of his faculties, multiplied by all the modern factors of civilization.

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