The Social Revolution

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

(Continued.)

Issuing from the ranks of the serfs, there rose and developed a new class, the chartered burghers and free peasants, the former organized into powerful guilds. The class represented by the guilds constituted the elements from which sprang the bourgeoisie, or future Capitalist class. The bourgeois artisans developed industry, producing rich stuffs, woolens, metal tools and weapons of a superior grade; they developed commerce, and exchanged their products for the riches of the East,—precious metals, silks and spices. The new method of production and the increasing wealth of its owners, made of the bourgeoisie a powerful economic factor in feudal society, that gradually rendered the feudal class dependent upon it. Feudal rule was grounded on *land*, the reason therefor being the economic structure and conditions of production of the Middle Ages. Trade and industry being very slightly developed, the wealth and subsistence of society was mainly, if not wholly, derived from agriculture; the feudal class owning the land necessarily made it the then dominant class in society. Amongst the bourgeoisie there rose and slowly developed a new, the Capitalist economic system, grounded on *capital*—the new bourgeois method of production. The growing economic power of capital made its pulsations felt in the efforts of the bourgeoisie to acquire the political dominance of society with which to bulwark their economic interests. In the development of the means of production and exchange, which constituted the capital of the bourgeoisie, the feudal relations of property and rule became so many fetters, restricting the development of the bourgeoisie and its economic system. These fetters had to be burst asunder; and the then rising Capitalist Class sustained long protracted struggles in its efforts to cast off the yoke of feudalism. In these struggles the bourgeoisie sought to create a social revolution to the orchestration of "liberty, equality, fraternity"; its spokesmen created the impression that the contemplated revolution was based on an impulse of Right, of idealism. But however sincere the intellectual leaders of the bourgeoisie might have been; however their phrases might have inspired and deluded many men, especially the serfs and city proletarians, the real aim of the bourgeois revolution was to overthrow the feudal class, to secure for itself the political power, and usher in the "freedom of trade," so that capital might develop in unrestricted peace. What inspired the bourgeoisie was the vision of unrestricted industrial and commercial expansion, and the wealth that would thereby flow into its coffers. This lent them strength in their struggles, and they finally triumphed. Feudal rule was overthrown: the bourgeoisie, or Capitalist Class, enthroned itself as the new ruling class, and its interests became the dominant interests of society.

The Proletarian Revolution.

The new bourgeois society did not realize the ideals of the revolutionists: liberty, equality and fraternity failed to materialize. "The development of industry upon a capitalistic basis made poverty and misery of the working masses conditions of existence of society. Cash payment became more and more, in Carlyle's phrase, the sole nexus between man and man. The number of crimes increased from year to year. Formerly the feudal vices had openly stalked about in broad daylight; though not eradicated, they were now at any rate thrust into the background. In their stead, the bourgeois vices, hitherto practiced in secret, began to blossom all the more luxuriantly. Trade became to a greater and greater extent cheating. The 'fraternity' of the revolutionary motto was realized in the chicanery and rivalries of the battle of competition. Oppression by force was replaced by corruption; the sword, as the first social lever, by gold. The right of the first night was transferred from the feudal lords to the bourgeois manufacturers. Prostitution increased to an extent never heard of. Marriage itself remained, as before, the legally recognized form, the official cloak of prostitution, and, moreover, was supplemented by rich crops of adultery . . . In a word, compared with the splendid promises of the philosophers, the social and political institutions born of the 'triumph of reason' were bitterly disappointing caricatures." (Frederick Engels, Socialism, Utopian and Scientific," pages 5-6. Labor News edition).

The reason for this disappointment lies in that the bourgeois revolution was a *class revolution*, that did not do away with class antagonisms, but established new methods of oppression and consequent class struggle in place of the old. The private ownership of the natural and social resources was not destroyed, but transferred from one class to another: hence a class struggle was inevitable.

The class struggle in modern Capitalist society is between the bourgeoisie, or Capitalist Class, owners of the means of production and exchange, and the proletariat, or Working Class, the disinherited and propertiless workers, who own nothing but their labor power, which they must sell to the capitalists in order to live and reproduce their kind.

The members of the working Class are not free. They are wage-slaves—slaves to the economic masters, to the class who owns the industrial establishments, and thereby owns the tools which the workers must use in order to live. The whip of economic necessity drives the workers to slave for these masters, whatever conditions the latter may impose upon them. It is mere buncombe and contemptible claptrap for the politicians and preachers to prate about the Declaration of Independence guaranteeing every citizen of "free (?) America" the "inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Liberty and happiness depend upon life, and life is predicated upon an adequate supply of food, clothing and shelter. And if to live working men and women must go to an employer and humbly ask of him the chance to work, and earn the money with which to buy the requisite food, clothing and shelter, then these workers are not free; they are economically dependent upon the employing class, and economic dependence is the root of slavery. The workers must sell themselves piecemeal, like any other commodity; they are mere cogs in the huge machinery of production, have lost all individuality, and their wages are restricted to the bare necessities of life. This being so, the phrase "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" becomes, to the Working men and women, a hideous mockery.

The Working Class and the Capitalist Class have nothing in common. Whatever relation there may exist between exploiter and exploited, robber and robbed, it surely is not one of "identity of interests." The application of this latter theory to actual practice crystallizes into a Civic Federation, where labor is betrayed by its venal "leaders," or in "profit-sharing" schemes that have as their only and intended consequence riveting the chains of wage-slavery more firmly on the limbs of the Working Class. There is, and can be, no identity between these two classes: they can meet only to wage an irreconcilable conflict—a class war that can end only in the overthrow of Capitalism or in the more complete and degrading subjugation of the proletariat. Whoever prates labor" is either a knave or a fool: in labor" is either a knave or o fool: in either case, a danger to the proletariat.

The Capitalist Class is becoming more and more a socially useless class, an incubus that hampers the productive activity of society. The capitalist has become completely divorced from the productive process; he is an idle parasite, who does not "direct," but sponges on production; the necessary work of directing production is done by wage-workers, paid superintendents and managers.

In his day, the great Utopian, Robert Owen, remarked that the 2,500 people who worked for him—"my slaves" he called them—produced as much actual wealth for society as barely half a century before it would have required a population of 600,000 to produce, despite which pregnant fact the workers were as poor and miserable as their forefathers had been. Whereat Owen asked himself the question: "What becomes of the difference between the wealth consumed by these 2,500 people and that which would have been required for the consumption of those 600,000?" And the answer was that it went to "supplying the proprietors of the establishment with 5 per cent. interest on their investment, beside a profit of more than 2,300,000 pounds sterling."

Since Owen's day the powers of production have increased to a gigantic extent. Machinery has been perfected to the point where the "wheels move of themselves," and the wealth produced, and producible in still larger volume, is stupendous,—wealth ample enough to provide for all the wants of human beings with a minimum of labor. Nevertheless, what do we see? Poverty increasing in direct ratio with the increase in the productivity of human labor; the wages of the workers remaining at a standstill, even declining, while the cost of living mounts higher and higher, with results that are truly infamous—workingmen being forced to steal and workingwomen forced to embrace Mrs. Warren's Profession, that is to say, Prostitution; thousands of unemployed workers, seeking for work, yet unable to find it, because their labor would no longer be profitable to their employers; while, in direct contrast to this gloomy picture, we see affluence and idleness on the increase amongst the Capitalist Class. Why is this so? The answer is the answer of Owen to his query—the increased wealth produced goes to pay dividends to the owners of the machinery of production, who are thereby enabled to live in idleness and luxury, while the workers rot in excessive toil and misery. The workers through surplus value [5] are robbed of what they produce by their labor; the greater part of the wealth they create is appropriated and squandered by a class of idlers, who perform no useful labor, but reap the reward of the labor of others. To this fact is due the increasing misery and degradation of the workers, they receiving in wages but enough for them to live on the ragged edge of starvation, reproduce their kind, and thereby create new material for the insatiable mills of Mammon. There is no hope of alleviating these terrible conditions while Capitalism endures: there is no escape from this "hell of proletarianism"; for on the portal of the Capitalist Inferno are inscribed the words that Dante inscribed over the hell pictured by his imagination.——

"All hope abandon, ye who enter here."
(Lasciata ogni speranza voi che entrata)

These are the conditions—the division of society into economic classes and increasing poverty for the WorkingClass with increasing mechanical progress—that breed the class struggle. The emancipation of the Proletariat from their infamous servitude and degradation lies in doing away with Capitalism, the abolition of private property in the means of production and exchange, and the democratic socialization of the land on and the tools with which to work.

Social evolution has provided a material basis for the realization of these demands of Socialism: the Socialist system in embryo has been evolved by the evolutionary process of Capitalist economic development. Nursed into vigor by Capitalism itself, the identical phenomenon that we saw occur in feudalism has taken place: the rise and development of a new, this time Socialist, economic system. The *individual* ownership and operation of the means of production is the basis of Capitalism. Through the process of economic development *individualism in production has vanished*, and *social production*, as exemplified by our trusts, *has taken its place*. Ownership and appropriation, however, still continue to be individual acts, the social product being appropriated by the individual capitalist or combination of capitalists. To solve this contradiction, the cause of all its misery, the proletariat needs but to organize and transform the socialized means of production into public property, realizing *social ownership as well as social production*. The conditions are ripe for the proletariat to accomplish its emancipation.

Socialism is thus seen to be based on ascertained sociologic facts: the modern class struggle, on which the Socialist movement bases itself, is the product of a series of similar struggles, the present subject class the last of a series of similar subject classes; and the struggle waged between capitalists and proletarians can only result either in the emancipation of the Working Class, and progress be thereby perpetuated, or in the collapse of existing civilization. [6]

This historical development puts Socialist aspirations on a sound material basis: in its light, the Socialist Republic looms in all its splendor, not as a mere dream of visionaries, but as the logical resultant of the inherent forces of historical development.

This fact, which should be an inspiration and strength to the Socialist movement, has, through its perversion by some people, been converted into a curse, prolific of danger to the Working Class movement for emancipation.

The poverty and degradation of the workers being due to their expropriation by Capitalism, it follows that reforms, as an end in themselves, are futile, and that only the abolition of wage-slavery can alter the degrading position of the Working Class. This is evident, and all who claim to be Socialists will subscribe to it. Nevertheless, we hear the cry welling up from the ranks of the Socialist movement for what is termed "constructive work", and we find many Socialists advocating and fighting for reform. On pointing out to these individuals the futility of reform, they will answer that they are "practical Socialists"; that the reforms they advocate are "steps" in the direction of the Socialist Republic; that their "constructive" reform work is the only true basis for a Socialist movement; that they believe in evolution and not revolution:—a position that has been well summarized by Jaures, in the phrase, *"We will carry our reform work to a total and complete transformation of the existing order."*

This position is an obviously weak one. Like the Utopian Socialists that held forth prior to the era of Marxian Socialism, the reformers strive for a gradual transformation of Capitalism by Socialism; they seek to realize a sufficient number of reforms, and out of them, like a yard of calico turned out by a Northrop loom, is to issue the Socialist Republic. It may be possible to ameliorate the conditions of the workers by reforms, but not do away with wage-slavery. Furthermore, the Capitalist class is not going to submit to being gradually "pared" to death; it will resist one real reform that actually menaces its interests as it would a social revolution; it would precipitate a crisis, and if the Working Class has been dissipating its energies battling for reforms, the emergency will find it unprepared, and the defeat of the Socialist movement result. [7] All may be lost on the road of reform; little, if anything, can be gained.

The attempt to draw a distinction between revolution and evolution denotes a lack of knowledge concerning the meaning of the two terms. Evolution and revolution are not antagonistic; they are supplementary: they mark different periods in the identical process. The evolutionary process begins, for instance, from the moment conception takes place, and continues until the hour of birth sounds. At that stage evolution is capped by revolution; at one stroke a fetus, hitherto constituting a portion of the organism of the mother, becomes an independent human being. The child comes forth with all the essential organs necessary to life. Furthermore, the sudden transformation at birth is confined wholly to *functions;* the organs have had a pre-natal development; if the act of birth takes place before the maturity of this development, the result is death. And so with the Social Revolution. The organic structure of the Socialist Republic must develop within the womb of Capitalist society, and the Revolution must find this organic structure sufficiently developed to assume the new functions of carrying on production when Capitalism shall have been overthrown; if this development has not attained the requisite ripeness, the Revolution will prove abortive. This implies the *integral industrial organization;* but of this more later on. The evolutionist, who grasps the meaning of the terms he uses, must be an eventual revolutionist; the revolutionist, conscious of what he is saying, must be an evolutionist. The one complements the other. [8]

Stripped of all his phrases, the "Socialist"-reformer is seen to be naught else than an economic fatalist. His reasoning, conscious or unconscious, is this: Socialism is inevitable, as social evolution conclusively demonstrates; the Socialist Republic being a pre-destined inevitable development, the best thing for us to do in the transition stage is to ameliorate the lot of the proletariat by wringing as many reforms as possible from the Capitalist class. So far has this fatalism been carried, that many "Socialists," such as Gaylord Wilshire, for instance, declare that the Socialist Republic will not be established by the Working Class, *per se*, but that an industrial crisis and huge unemployed problem will confront the country, and that the dominant political party, Republican or Democratic, will be therefore forced to avail itself of the only solution possible—Socialism. What Wilshire and his ilk fail to grasp is that this form of "Socialism" would be nothing else than State Capitalism, and would rivet more firmly the chains of slavery on the limbs of the workers.

Is Socialism Inevitable?

Is Socialism inevitable? Yes and no; according to the angle of vision with which we view the subject.

Socialism is inevitable, in the sense that the members of the Working Class are human beings, endowed with human feelings, that will rebel against their miserable economic conditions; endowed with an intelligence that will make them realize the cause of their misery, and the opportunity that social evolution grants them of emancipation, and thereby emancipate the whole human race as well. Socialism is inevitable, also, in the sense that, coupled with these two factors, the revolutionary movement will be imbued with the requisite intelligence to steer clear of tactical mis-steps, and self-reliant enough to resist the lure of sops and palliatives, that dull the revolutionary fibre. In this sense, Socialism is inevitable, as day follows night.

Socialism, however, is not fatalism; it recognizes the human factor in social evolution, and the disastrous results that may follow in the wake of a revolutionary class whose revolutionary feelings and aspirations are run into the ground by different causes operating to achieve the same end. While like conditions give birth always to same effects, the identical phenomena of the past occur in our era, with variations, due to local exigencies and social development. Nothing is the result of any particular one, but of many factors operating together. A factor that renders thorny the path of the revolutionary Socialist movement is the profound difference between past class revolutions and the revolution contemplated by the modern proletariat.

All past revolutions were, in a limited sense, automatic. Their distinctive feature was the ownership and possession by the revolutionary subject class of the material means essential to the new social system which their struggles sought to bring into being. We have seen this to be so in the case of the bourgeois. The basis of feudalism was land; the basis of the new, the oncoming social system, was capital; and the development of their economic power implied in the possession of capital, was the sign of bourgeois ripeness for revolution. The feudal lords becoming in time dependent upon the economic power of the bourgeois, rendered the latter powerful and arrogant; and where this is coupled with class interests whose development is restricted by feudal relations of property and rule, a revolution is bound to occur and to succeed. Indeed, so automatic was the bourgeois revolution; so inevitable was the change from feudal to bourgeois social supremacy, that it required no special courage or intelligence for the bourgeois to achieve success. Their revolution was marked by cowardly incapacity and vacillation; their struggles were one long series of compromises with the feudal class, even on the eve of victory; and where they made a drastic change, as in France, it was not due to their own efforts, but to the bravery of the peasants and city proletarians. The compromising nature of the bourgeois revolution can be seen from the fact that at the present time, in most European countries, huge boulders of feudalism still survive. But so inevitable was the rise of bourgeois social supremecy, due to the development of capital, the wealth of which grew vastly more in volume, hence socially powerful, than land, that, in spite of the cowardice and incapacity of the bourgeois revolutionists, the change from feudalism to capitalism was successfully accomplished.

Different is it with the Proletarian Revolution, that is destined by social evolution to end forever class rule and despotism.

The basis of the oncoming social system—the Socialist Republic—is the *modern highly developed machinery of production*, which, being communal and social in its operation, is therefore capable of being likewise socially owned; and which, by virtue of its tremendous powers of productivity, is enabled to free humanity from want, the fear of want, and the necessity of arduous toil to provide for our physical necessities. But the material means essential to the new social system of Socialism are, unlike the capital of the bourgeois, in the control of the ruling class, from whom the proletariat must wrest them. The Working Class is thus seen to be bereft of material economic power—a state of things prolific of danger to the Socialist movement. The revolutionary path of the bourgeois was clear of pit-falls; the development of its economic power made the bourgeois revolution an automatic one. However incapable and cowardly its leaders; however many its compromises with the foe, the eventual victory of the then rising Capitalist Class was assured, owing to its possession of capital, which rendered slight and insignificant the wealth and economic power of the land held by the feudal class. Otherwise is it with the modern proletariat, the revolutionary path of whom is strewn with obstacles that only extreme tactical caution can surmount. Compromise is of the very flesh and bone of the bourgeois revolution; the spirit of the Proletarian Revolution, on the contrary, is strictly revolutionary and uncompromising. Bereft as it is of material economic power, compromise on the part of the proletariat can only lead to disaster, in that compromise blunts its revolutionary fibre and distracts attention from the real and only issue—the overthrow of Capitalism. The proletariat is propertiless and poor; poverty and misery breed lack of self-reliance, that demoralizes the will and renders servile those whom it holds within its grasp. Often is the remark heard emanating from Socialists, that if the workers do not accept Socialism by virtue of enlightened reason, they will be forced to accept it by virtue of empty stomachs. "When their stomachs rub against their backbone, they will commence to think." Nothing is wider of the mark. Poverty suggests temporary devices to alleviate its misery, and an empty stomach is more likely to make a person think of how to fill it than to think of revolution. Sops and palliatives become captivating baits; and in the desire for temporary relief, the revolutionary spark is apt to be smothered and extinguished. Or else the poisonous cauldron of misery may boil over, and the miserable slaves of capital break forth, in a fury of hate and vengeance, and wreck and murder in their blind despair; a futile revolt that the Capitalist Class will ferociously suppress—in either case, misery becoming, not a weapon for proletarian emancipation, but of proletarian suicide. Only uncompromising revolutionary activity, and sound, militant organization can neutralize these dangers.

The Socialist movement must rigorously exclude all fatalism from its councils. The Socialist Republic will not come as a bolt from a clear sky; it is no predestined social development; it depends upon evolution, and, coupled with this, clearness of vision on the part of the proletariat to help the evolutionary process. And neither is misery sufficient to bring the Social Revolution to a successful issue; if it were, the Revolution would have been accomplished ere this, for there is no lack of misery in the world. Education and organization are what is now required—organization drilled and disciplined to achieve the Social Revolution.

What specific forms shall this organization assume, and what tactics must the Socialist movement pursue to attain success?

[5] The theory of "surplus value" flows from the principle that labor creates all wealth, is the source of all value. The value of a commodity is determined by the labor *socially* necessary for its production; capitalists and stockholders performing no *socially* necessary function, their "work" being the depredatory work of pocketing the wealth produced by others, they add no value to a commodity. The workers producing all wealth and getting back in wages a mere pittance, the remainder appropriated by the capitalist is "surplus value"—that portion of wealth produced by labor over and above the wages needed for the workers' subsistence. "Surplus value" has existed since the rise of private property and class rule, only the method of its appropriation by the master class has changed with the changing mode of production.

[6] "Historical materialists," who are always prating of the term without grasping its significance, will no doubt deny that a collapse of existing civilization is possible; "the proletariat must conquer!" is their cry. The dangers besetting the path of the Proletarian Revolution, making it not at all "inevitable" are dealt with further on in the text. For the present, the following may be said: All social phenomena demonstrate that a revolution will occur in the near future; but this revolution may come either as a *Socialist* revolution, or as a cataclysm. In the latter event occuring, two results may follow: either the "common ruin of the contending classes," in which case we would see a revival of barbarism; or else the Capitalist Class come out victorious, with sufficient vitality to thoroughly organize and strengthen its oligarchic rule.—It is questionable whether, here in America, we are living under capitalism proper; we are in a monopoly period, that may be appropriately designated as "Plutocratic Feudalism." It is not baseless, or a vagary, to assume that, as industry becomes more thoroughly organized, more thoroughly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, a new ruling class will be evolved, consisting of the great plutocrats and the members of the "new middle class"—managers, superintendents, professional men, etc.; production be strictly regulated, producing sufficient to maintain the master class in luxury, and dole out to the workers enough to keep body and limb together; anarchy in production and crises be eliminated; work provided for the unemployed; and the Working Class be held down to a level of serfs. A powerful police and military power would necessarily be organized, and steps in this direction are already visible in increased naval armament, clamors for an increase in the strength of the regular army, and the *secret* enactment of the Dick Militia Law.

[7] It has been a common move of the ruling class in all history, when conservatism and other methods failed in preserving its supremacy, to precipitate a premature revolt of the enslaved class, and then bloodily suppress the insurrection. One who has studied the labor movement in America can fully grasp this important fact, for instances are numerous of the Capitalist Class inciting the workers, through the agency of Pinkerton spies and *agents provocateurs*, to premature revolt, riot and bloodshed. The Paris Commune should indelibly impress this lesson on our minds; for at that time the French Capitalist Class under the leadership of Thiers, invited and precipitated a premature revolt of the Parisian proletariat, when the latter was unprepared to sustain a conflict, and the result was defeat for the heroic Communards. A premature growth of the Socialist movement, made possible by compromise, by conciliating the prejudices of the proletariat, by adopting a "broad," "tolerant" policy, by advocating immediate demands, and thereby gain the votes of discontented bourgeois radicals, would be a grave danger; for if the Capitalist Class would precipitate a crisis, this "discontented" element would melt away like chaff before the wind, and leave the real revolutionary Socialists in the lurch, to be dealt with unmercifully by the master class. The Socialist movement must be uncompromising; must gather into its ranks thorough revolutionists, even though progress be slow; for only thus can we be prepared to meet the duplicity, brutality and stratagems of the Capitalist Class.

[8] At one time defenders of Capitalism, and many "Socialist"-reformers, sought to discredit the idea of a Social Revolution, a sudden change from Capitalism to Socialism, by prating of the "slowness of evolution" in nature. The pseudo-Darwinians are mainly to blame for the error. The theory which magnified the slowness of evolution has been exploded by the researches of Hugo De Vries and other scientists. In his book on "Mutation," De Vries demonstrated that, while the previous evolution in organic life was slow and gradual, the change itself that gave birth to a new species was a sudden leap—revolution. Nature develops both by evolution and revolution.

(To be concluded.)

For the Student

Communist Manifesto	$.10
Lasalle's Open Letter	.10
Life of Engels	.10
Ninth Convention S. L. P.	.10
No Compromise	.10
Socialism, What It Is	.10
Workingmen's Program	.10
Two Pages from Roman History	.15
American Industrial Evolution	.15
Value, Price, and Profit	.15
As to Politics	.20
Flashlights Amsterdam Congress	.25
Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon	.25
S. L. P. Report to Stuttgart Congress	.25

NEW YORK LABOR NEWS CO.
28 City Hall Place, New York.

MARX on MALLOCK
or
Facts vs. Fiction

By DANIEL DE LEON.

A LECTURE THAT EFFECTIVELY KNOCKS OUT THE CAPITALIST CLAIM THAT THE PLUNDER THEY TAKE FROM LABOR IS THE REWARD OF THEIR "DIRECTING ABILITY."

PRICE: FIVE CENTS.
25 Copies for $1.00.

N. Y. LABOR NEWS CO.
28 City Hall Place, N. Y.

Three Gems
OF
Scientific Socialism

We have just received another edition of three of the leading books on Scientific Socialism.

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific — By Engels.

Paris Commune — By Marx.

Wage, Labor and Capital—Free Trade — By Marx.

Cloth-bound, 50 Cents,
Postage Prepaid.

N. Y. LABOR NEWS CO.,
28 City Hall Place, New York.