

REVOLUTION AND REFORM

THERE still appears to be a great deal of confusion in the ranks of revolutionaries and reformers alike, as to what is meant by revolution and whether there is a quick route or a long route, a cataclysmic event or a period of ameliorative legislation, to get to El Dorado.

Daniel De Leon's definition of Revolution held the field for many years. He said of revolution in relation to society—"Whenever the internal mechanism is changed, we have revolution." This is good in its way, but does not fill the bill as completely as one would like. Lenin has come to the rescue. He says, in answer to the question as to whether the Soviet Government has a reformist or a revolutionary programme,

Reforms mean concessions got from a dominating class, while the latter's domination continues. Consequently, reformist programmes consist generally of many points of detail. Our revolutionary programme consisted, properly speaking, of one general point; overthrow of the landowners' and capitalists' yoke, wresting the power from them, liberating the working masses from their exploiters.

The Revolution, therefore, consists in the liberative act—"the overthrow of the landowners' and capitalists yoke, wresting the power from them, liberating the working masses from their exploiters."

A social revolution is the overthrow of a dominant class by one below it, which, in turn, becomes the dominant body. The social revolution, which alone can free the working class from the domination of another class, is the one to which Lenin refers, and involves, as a consequence, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Such a revolution does not mean, therefore, that we jump from capitalism to Utopia, as many appear to think if the criticisms levelled at the Russians are anything to go by. But it does mean that society can then be free to develop at its fastest. It does mean that the shackles fall off the workers at a rate impossible under the old régime. Again, I do not mean to say that every worker becomes by the wave of a magic wand a philosophical student or a master of science. Humanity has never yet discovered a way upward other than by hard work and persistent effort. But certainly the revolution would transfer to the working class *the power to develop itself*, which capitalism can never provide. Witness the history of any class which has come to power.

It may be asserted that this is class rule. True, with one mighty difference. This class rule gives an opportunity to the members of all other classes which they can never offer to the working class. All people can become, are invited to become members of the working class. The "middle class" cannot say to the workers—"W, invite you all to become members of the middle class." The capitalist class cannot invite us all to become exploiters "to reap where we do not sow." Their philosophy is, that "there must always be Capital and Labour, masters and men, employers and employees." And now, having cleared the ground a little with regard to what we

* See also paragraph on same subject in "Bookshelf."

mean by revolution and what it leads to, let us examine the attitude of revolutionists and reformers in relation thereto.

The revolutionist regards the revolution as of paramount importance, the one goal to which all efforts must be directed. Every factor of working-class experience, every movement which grows in their ranks, educational, political, industrial, their hunger or distress, their affluence or their poverty, he regards as of value in so far as they contribute to the growth of power and its convergence upon the citadel of the enemy. Not for one moment must the revolutionist think that a small minority can effect a *coup* and maintain a revolution. He must agitate and educate and organise until a large enough majority has been secured effectively to carry the revolution to a successful issue. Whether this shall be done by the ballot-box or by other means matters not for the moment. A majority must be secured.

The Reformists view the situation differently. They have a peculiar theory about the "natural growth of society," always with the implication that "natural" and "slow" are synonymous terms. They endeavour to think about society as a whole, deplore the hopeless ignorance of the working class, and hope by participating in political activity (or parliamentary activity) to support every measure which may ameliorate the conditions of the workers, in the hope that by their aid the workers will some day be sufficiently enlightened to vote a Parliamentary Socialist majority. Violent revolution they deplore and believe that in countries where constitutional democratic institutions exist the workers can get all they want. Revolutions may be alright for such countries as Russia, but here are undesirable and unnecessary. Hence they make up their programmes of detailed ameliorative measures. They will cheer to the echo a peroration about the "days that will be better than well," work laboriously for some small measure, and pathetically doubt the possibility of socialism "coming in their time."

However much the revolutionist and the reformer may cheer the same peroration, it is obvious that there is a fundamental difference involving great responsibilities. Both reformers and revolutionists have to deal with situations which arise independently of their will. From time to time mass movements are generated by the economic antagonisms, etc., in society. These movements do not wait for election times, but come independently of them. They have either to be led forward from strength to strength or driven into a variety of channels until strength is dissipated.

The reformer with his static conceptions under such circumstances is either swept forward in spite of himself or becomes part of the machinery of the governing class to crush the workers back into slumdom and the industrial hells of modern times. It is a terrific responsibility which the "reformers" will do well to ponder over. For the minorities of to-day have got to recognise the swiftly moving forces which can give to minorities majority power. Under the pressure of these forces modern institutions will be tested and their limitations discovered with a ruthlessness which many will deplore. The "reformists" may choose if they wish to be part of the reaction under the cloak of "democracy," but the revolutionist must waste no time in deploring the ignorance of the working class. Theirs is the responsibility of merging every element of social unrest among the workers, explaining and educating under the stress of actual circumstances, combining instinctive movement with intelligent direction, until the revolutionary minority becomes the revolutionary majority, capable not simply of moving up to the barriers of the existing institutions, but also of sweeping them away, and improvising and creating institutions responsive to revolutionary aspirations.

It is not a question of length of time. It is not a question of imposing socialism from above. It is rather a question as to which class we are prepared to support—the capitalist class or the working class. If the latter, then it is my contention that our activities must extend beyond ordinary propaganda, educational classes, etc., to the harnessing of every possible movement, educating the workers by the experience of conscious movements persistently explained and directed in terms of class. It is not for us to suppress and sidetrack movements, but to aim at developing the conscious majority by every means in our power. The difficulties are stupendous. The risks are great. These, however, do not shift the responsibility.

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