

THE NEW SOCIALISM.

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It is evident to anyone who can read the signs of the times that one of those crazes that periodically attack the English people is just commencing. The working classes, as they are generally but improperly called, are to raise the red flag, property is to be attacked in every quarter, the "State" is to be the only employer of "labour," all landed property is to be nationalised, and all other property is to be periodically divided so as to be equally distributed. Naturally, a Republic will be established, and the most snobbish worshippers of aristocracy and titles in the world will all become "citizens" or "citizenesses," like the men and women of the first French Republic.

Now, all this nonsense would be simply amusing if it did not to some extent justify itself by producing some of the effects that it prophesies. Human nature, as the democrats of the French Republic found to their cost, when they obtained political supremacy, remains much the same under every political regime; the strongest men in mind and body, somehow or other, get the upper hand, and rule; the weaker have to submit; mobs assemble and are dispersed by a cavalry charge or a rifle volley, or by the mitraille of artillery, thousands are killed, and "order" is restored, after the loss of property that cannot be estimated, and of life, that if known, is, for prudential reasons, never published. No one, to this day, knows the loss of life and property caused by the insurrection of the Commune of Paris, or by the slaughter following the coup d'état of Napoleon III., or by the insurrection in June, 1843, or the Revolution of February, 1848. The number of men killed in suppressing the Indian Mutiny far surpassed the loss of life in any war of modern times, but the numbers, if known, are never even vaguely mentioned.

The Utopias dreamed of by the most sincere and single-minded of twentieth century Socialists are so contrary to all we know of human nature, that they may be simply laughed at as absurd. The paid advocates of the capitalist class are content with refuting their absurdities, and wholly neglecting the conditions that really exist, and which alone give any force to the Socialist argument.

It is abundantly clear that the physically strong men of fixed and resolute will, selfish, but not unwisely selfish, capable of self-restraint, foreseeing a little of the future, and capable of self-denial, when self-denial will answer his purpose—it is clear to every student of human nature, that such a man will attain relative wealth and power. He will govern weaker men mentally, he will by his physical prowess, subdue weaker men physically, he will by his achievements, by the wealth he gathers, and by the exercise of superior will power, gather round him a band of adherents whose fortunes will be bound up with his, who will carry out his views, and obey his orders implicitly. Such a man we have seen in our own day arise in Mexico, Porfirio Diaz, the Dictator of Mexico, who has raised his country from being a by-word for corruption, military despotism, anarchy, tempered by periods of despotic misrule, into the best governed and most truly progressive country in the world. But if anyone in Mexico were to attempt to investigate all the history of those days during which Porfirio Diaz was fighting his way to supreme power, methinks he would very soon find it expedient to leave Mexico. There are some things little children must not ask about.

Now, what the capitalist class either ignores, or does not sufficiently estimate, is the enormous difference in the outlook of persons who, as long as anything short of anarchy survives, are possessed of sufficient property to maintain them in comfort, without depending on their own exertions for a livelihood, and of those whose whole income depends on their own personal exertions, and must cease at once if sickness or accident or old age prevents them from working.

This is the fate of the immense majority of mankind. They never were at any period of their lives, for one day, possessed of a sum of money (or of equivalent property) that would have sufficed to provide them with food, clothing and lodging, even for one year. They never had the chance that such a sum

would have given them, of commencing some small business, that carried on by themselves and their families might lift them up above the position of daily wage-earners. Of such people all, except a few of the highest-paid mechanics and skilled artificers, are the whole of the wage-earners in Great Britain. And more lamentable even than their position is that of a large minority whose wages are so small, or so precarious (depending on weather, fashion, the fluctuations of trade), that they cannot provide even the barest necessities of life at times, and have to resort to charity or poor law relief.

Besides these, who may be said to have legitimate grounds for complaint against the present social order and who certainly have no interest in maintaining it, we have an important lower middle class, comprising professional men, lawyers, doctors, school teachers, clerks, foremen in large businesses, whose incomes are so small, and often so fluctuating or uncertain, that they can barely keep up a respectable appearance, are constantly in the pinch of poverty, are liable, without the utmost frugality, to run into debt, and are very nearly as dependent on the strength, health, and skill of the head of the family, as is the carpenter or the bricklayer. This class, to which for the greater part of my life, I belonged, have no reason to uphold the present social system. I have often said that I would not lift a finger, if to lift that finger would save the whole of the present social and political system from total ruin and anarchy. But neither would I have helped to destroy it, for I have read history, and lived through periods which now belong to history, and I know the frightful misery the revolution would entail. But it is from the class to which I belong, the educated middle class, that the dangerous element of these revolutionary movements will proceed. Here and there, as in the case of Mirabeau, or Barras, a member of the old aristocracy may take the lead for the time, but by far the majority have belonged to the middle class. Those who have sprung from the wage-earners have always had some advantage either of education or patronage which has given them that first step which, in so many cases, is all that they require.

I do not recall a single case in which any conspicuous leader in revolutionary movements has emerged from the lowest rank. These people are satisfied for the time if they get good food, clothing and warmth.

Where the danger to the capitalist lies is in the extreme probability that the Socialist leaders will make use of their theories, and their voting power to extort concessions in the way of shorter hours, higher wages and restrictions in the employment of non-unionists which will make their capital absolutely unprofitable. The ordinary unionist thinks that because the owner of a large factory lives in a good house, has several servants, drives about in a motor car, and can dress himself and his family in expensive naiment, that his profits must be large enough to enable him to pay higher wages. It may be so; and the competition may be so keen that the manufacturer, rather than risk a strike, consents to raise the wages. Then one of two things happens; either he takes the loss on himself, or he raises the price of the article he makes to his customers. The process of raising prices can only be carried on as long as there is a continued demand for the article from the public. Let us suppose that the demand was a thousand gross in 1907. Supposing that in the first six months of the present year orders for only 450 or 500 gross came in, it would obviously be absurd to raise the price, strike or no strike. Then the loss caused by the rise in wages must fall on the manufacturer. But an increase in the wage which seems but a small sum to the workman, makes an enormous difference when multiplied by a hundred or a thousand. Suppose the rise amounts to two shillings a week on an average for each man (and there would hardly be a strike for less), then if a thousand workmen are employed, this would involve an expenditure of £5,200 per annum. As soon as the educated part of the middle class get that hold of their fellow workers, which they must and will have, they will guide and teach

them so that they will not make foolish demands, and so kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

The real danger of the present socialistic movement lies in this; both political parties like to increase the patronage at their disposal; both are willing to multiply offices if they can get any plausible excuse for creating new ones; all these socialistic schemes necessarily involve the creation of new offices and the opportunities of increasing patronage, until we arrive at the condition we have in New Zealand, where every boy or girl who has passed the sixth standard, thinks he or she ought to have a government or at least a municipal billet, and would scorn to earn his or her bread by bodily labour of any kind.

Besides this the universal race after billets produces a moral cowardice that used to be unknown in England. Nobody dares to express his opinions, nobody will take part in any public question unless he can be sure of a party at his back;

there is no public feeling, there are no public meetings, no agitations for anything except grants of Government money. Does a Minister visit any local city, you find the whole community crawling at his feet, and ready to lick the dust off his boots, if they can get their requests granted. Look at the way the people used to bespatter Mr. Seddon with the most fulsome flattery that ever was bestowed on a human being—and look at the subscription lists for the national memorial now! There is absolutely no public opinion, good, bad, or indifferent in New Zealand; the plebs, here are made for nothing but slavery. Never, surely, was such degeneracy seen in such a short time. The difference between the pioneer settlers and miners of New Zealand and Australia, and their descendants, is as great as that between the English official in India, and the Bengali Baboo who crouches before him.

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