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SOCIALISM AND POLITICS.

(AN ANSWER TO "ANOTHER VIEW.")

A FRIEND, R. F. E. Willis, whose letter we publish, seems inclined to answer the question, "Shall Socialists enter the Parliamentary struggle?" in the affirmative. The question is such a serious one that I make no excuse for answering our friend at some length.

I must admit that as a matter of policy it might be prudent to affect a belief in the Parliamentary method of revolution, even if we did not really believe in them, and this all the more in the face of the coming election, which has aroused such hopes in the minds of Democrats—hopes likely to be disappointed, even on the mere Democratic side. But I am convinced that all such dishonesty is sure to fall back on the heads of those that practise it, and that it is no use enrolling recruits who do not really agree with us, and will fall away before the first sincere declaration of our principles. Therefore I think that Socialists ought not to hesitate to choose between Parliamentarism and revolutionary agitation, and that it is a mistake to try and sit on the two stools at once; and, for my part, I hope that they will declare against Parliamentarism, as I feel assured that otherwise they will have to retrace their steps at the cost of much waste of time and discouragement.

I now ask our friend—what is the object of Socialism? Do we not hope to see society transformed, to be changed into something quite different from what it now is? On the other hand the object of Parliamentary institutions is the preservation of society in its present form—to get rid of defects in the machine in order to keep the machine going. Liberal legislation (and there is no other, for the Tories are forced to legislate liberally when they are in office) means yielding what is absolutely necessary to popular demands in the assured hope of hushing those demands, so that the fleecing of the people may not come to an end.

Let us take the Factory Acts instanced as an example by our friend, and see how the thing works. It was necessary (as it still is) to our capitalist manufacture that the auxiliary labour of women and children should be employed, so as to keep down the cost of production by lowering the wages of adult males. But in the earlier years of the great machine industry, the monstrous abuses in the employment of women and children, which could no longer be hushed up, threatened the existence of that employment. Necessity therefore compelled the manufacturers to submit to the palliation of these abuses, so that now the burden of this still shameful labour is lightened, and thereby the system is saved—which means that the wives and children of our factory workmen cheapen labour for the manufacturers at the expense of their own husbands and fathers. Meantime there is still left a large mass of "auxiliary labour," untouched by the Factory Acts, which will remain till Socialism has transformed our civilisation.

On the one hand, therefore, the slavery of the better-off workers, though lightened, is confirmed. On the other, the fringe of labour, which is absolutely necessary to our present system of manufacture, is left untouched or even changed for the worse.

This is the regular course of Parliamentary legislation, which acts like a doctor trying to heal his patient by attacking the symptoms and letting the cause of disease alone. In short, for the purpose for which it is intended, the support of the class-state, Parliamentary legislation is valid, otherwise it is a delusion.

I should like our friend to understand whither the whole system of palliation tends—namely, towards the creation of a new middle class to act as a buffer between the proletariat and their direct and obvious masters; the only hope of the bourgeois for retarding the advance of Socialism lies in this device. Let our friend think of a society thus held together. Let him consider how sheepishly the well-to-do workers to-day offer themselves to the shearer; and are we to help our masters to keep on creating fresh and fresh flocks of such sheep? What a society that would be, the main support of which would be capitalists masquerading as working men! Shall the ultimate end of civilisation be the perpetual widening of the middle classes? I think if our friend knew as well as I do the terrible

mental degradation of our middle classes, their hypocrisy, their cowardice, their joylessness, it would scare him from attempting to use their beloved instrument of amelioration—Parliament.

It is a new Society that we are working to realise, not a cleaning up of our present tyrannical muddle into an improved smoothly-working form of that same "order," a mass of dull and useless people organised into classes, amidst which the antagonism should be moderated and veiled so that they should act as checks on each other for the insurance of the stability of the system.

The real business of Socialists is to impress on the workers the fact that they are a class, whereas they ought to be Society; if we mix ourselves up with Parliament we shall confuse and dull this fact in people's minds instead of making it clear and intensifying it. The work that lies before us at present is to *make Socialists*, to cover the country with a network of associations composed of men who feel their antagonism to the dominant classes, and have no temptation to waste their time in the thousand follies of party politics. If by chance any good is to be got out of the legislation of the ruling classes, the necessary concessions are much more likely to be wrung out of them by their fear of such a body, than they are to be wheedled and coaxed out of them by the continual life of compromise which "Parliamentary Socialists" would be compelled to live, and which is deadly to that feeling of exalted hope and brotherhood that alone can hold a revolutionary party together.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THE WORK BEFORE US.

THE writer of this article has come to England—the country which has been a leader of humanity ever since she had the splendid daring to attack the doctrine of "divine" rights, *vested* rights, by cutting off the head of her king—to join his fellow-Socialists in the battle that now is being waged all over the civilised world. Against what? Some will say: against the selfishness of the well-to-do classes? I prefer to say, against in-grown habits, against the indolence, the sluggishness of human nature, on the one hand, and on the other, against traditional views of the universe and the place we ought to fill in it, against mistaken notions which men have, and most naturally have, of their own true interests. If that be so, then it follows that our work is of a two-fold nature—to arouse and quicken the consciences, feelings, impulses of men, to *agitate*; to inculcate correct knowledge of society and our relation to it, to *teach*.

It has made me truly happy to find that the Socialist League, and, indeed, all in Great Britain who deserve the name of Socialists, are devoting all their means and energies to mental, intellectual activity. It particularly gave me satisfaction to read, in the May number of the *Commonweal*, "We must first have a mental revolution, or the physical one would be hopeless, but that just in proportion as the mental revolution is complete *will all danger of a sanguinary one be averted*." That is, in my opinion, exactly the correct idea, and I think that we ought everywhere and at all times to lay stress upon it, so as to disarm the suspicion born of misapprehension. Rifles may be good enough, when the conditions are ripe, but they are irresistible only when *ideas* take aim at the butt-end. Therefore I apprehend that our first and main business is to put ideas into the minds of the people, full well knowing that if they are once there, actions will follow fast enough.

The fundamental Socialist idea which we then are to impress on the people is, I conceive, this: that as Society hitherto has been based on wealth, in the future Society is to be based on labour. And let it never be forgotten that this means labour *intellectual as well as manual*. Those who work with the head have had pretty nearly as little consideration and as little influence on the conduct of public affairs as those who work with the hand; they are in very many instances just as badly off as the latter, and when they are, they are liable to feel their inferior condition most keenly; and what is perhaps of the greatest importance, it is an absolute necessity to a successful issue of our movement that we draw people of education into it, and they will never be more wanted than just now at the start. Fortunately, our movement is of such a character that it can