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WHERE ARE WE NOW?

It is good from time to time for those who are engaged in a serious movement to look back and review the progress of the past few years; which involves looking around them and noting the way the movement is affecting other people. It is good to do so for this reason amongst others, that men absorbed in such a movement are apt to surround themselves with a kind of artificial atmosphere which distorts the proportions of things outside, and prevents them from seeing what is really going on, and consequently from taking due council as to what is best to do.

It is now some seven years since Socialism came to life again in this country. To some the time will seem long, so many hopes and disappointments as have been crowded into them. Yet in the history of a serious movement seven years is a short time enough; and few movements surely have made so much progress during this short time in one way or another as Socialism has done.

For what was it which we set out to accomplish? To change the system of society on which the stupendous fabric of civilisation is founded, and which has been built up by centuries of conflict with older and dying systems, and crowned by the victory of modern civilisation over the material surroundings of life.

Could seven years make any visible impression on such a tremendous undertaking as this?

Consider, too, the quality of those who began and carried on this business of reversing the basis of modern society! Who were the statesmen who took up the momentous questions laid before England of the nineteenth century by the English Socialists? Who were the great divines who preached this new gospel of happiness from their pulpits? Who were the natural philosophers who proclaimed their hope and joy at the advent of a society which should at last use their marvellous discoveries for the good of mankind?

There is no need to take a pen in hand to write their names. The traveller (*i.e.*, the toiler) had fallen among thieves, and the priest and the Levite went by on the other side; or perhaps in this case threw a stone or two at the wounded man: it was but a Samaritan, an outcast, an unrespectable person, who helped him.

Those who set out "to make the revolution"—that is, as afore said, to put society on a new basis, contradictory to the existing one—were a few working-men, less successful even in the wretched life of labour than their fellows; a sprinkling of the intellectual proletariat, whose keen pushing of Socialism must have seemed pretty certain to extinguish their limited chances of prosperity; one or two outsiders in the game political; a few refugees from the bureaucratic tyranny of foreign governments; and here and there an unpractical, half-cracked artist or author.

Yet such as they were, they were enough to do something. Through them, though not by them, the seven years of the new movement toward freedom have, contrary to all that might have been expected, impressed the idea of Socialism deeply on the epoch. It is true that the toilers have not begun to reap benefit from that impression; but it was impossible that they should. No permanent material benefit can accrue to them until Socialism has ceased to be militant, and is merged in the new society. But as I said the other week, the move-

ment has at least accomplished this, that no one who thinks is otherwise than discontented with things as they are. The shouts of triumph over the glories of civilisation which once drowned the moans of the miserable (and that but a dozen years ago at most) have now sunk into quavering apologies for the existence of the horrors and fatuities of our system; a system which is only defended as a thing to be endured for lack of a better, and until we can find some means of packing it off into limbo: and the workers, who in the period of "leap and bound prosperity" were thought to have reached the end of their tether, and to be fixed in a kind of subordinate heaven on earth, are now showing that they are not going to stop *there*, at any rate, and whatever happens. And the principles of Socialism are beginning to be understood, so that to some of ourselves, who are always hearing of them, they seem now mere commonplaces which need not be insisted on. Though with that view I can, as I shall show presently, by no means agree.

All this has come to pass. How and why? Was it by virtue of the qualities of those who have furthered it? That little band of oddities who fell in with Socialism during these last few years, did it turn out after all that they were so much better than they seemed? Well, they were (and are), most of them, human at least; but otherwise it cannot be said that great unexpected talent for administration and conduct of affairs has been developed amongst us, nor any vast amount of foresight either. We have been what we seemed to be (to our friends I hope)—and that was no great things. We have between us made about as many mistakes as any other party in a similar space of time. Quarrels more than enough we have had; and sometimes also weak assent for fear of quarrels to what we did not agree with.

There has been self-seeking amongst us, and vainglory, and sloth, and rashness; though there has been at least courage and devotion also. When I first joined the movement I hoped that some working-man leader, or rather leaders, would turn up, who would push aside all middle-class help, and become great historical figures. I might still hope for that, if it seemed likely to happen, for indeed I long for it enough; but to speak plainly it does not so seem at present.

Yet, I repeat, in spite of all drawbacks the impression has been made, and why? The reason for it has been given in words said before, but which I must needs say again: because that seemingly inexpugnable fabric of modern society is verging towards its fall; it has done its work, and is going to change into something else. That is the reason why, with all our faults, we have been able to do something; nor do I believe that there will ever be lacking instruments for bringing about the great change, exactly in proportion to the readiness of the solid elements in society—the workers, to wit—to receive that change, and carry on the new order to which it will give birth.

So much at least we have to encourage us. But are not some of us disappointed in spite of the change of the way in which Socialism is looked on generally? It is but natural that we should be. When we first began to work together, there was little said about anything save the great ideals of Socialism; and so far off did we seem from the realisation of these, that we could hardly think of any means for their realisation, save great dramatic events which would make our lives tragic indeed, but would take us out of the sordidness of the so-called "peace" of civilisation. With the great extension of Socialism, this also is changed. Our very success has dimmed the great ideals that first led us on; for the hope of the partial and, so to say, vulgarised realisation of Socialism is now pressing on us. I think that we are all confident that Socialism will be realised: it is not wonderful, then, that we should long to see—to feel—its realisation in our own life-time. Methods of realisation, therefore, are now more before our eyes than ideals: but it is of no use talking about methods which are not, in part at least, immediately feasible, and it is of the nature of such partial methods to be sordid and discouraging, though they *may* be necessary.

There are two tendencies in this matter of methods: on the one hand is our old acquaintance palliation, elevated now into vastly greater importance than it used to have, because of the growing discontent, and the obvious advance of Socialism; on the other is the method of partial, necessarily futile, inconsequent revolt, or riot rather, against the authorities, who are our absolute masters, and can easily put it down.

With both of these methods I disagree; and that the more because

the palliatives have to be clamoured for, and the riots carried out by men who do not know what Socialism is, and have no idea what their next step is to be, if contrary to all calculation they should happen to be successful. Therefore, at the best our masters would be our masters still, because there would be nothing to take their place. We are not ready for such a change as that! The authorities might be a little shaken, perhaps, a little more inclined to yield something to the clamours of their slaves, but there would be slaves still, as all men must be who are not prepared to manage their own business themselves. Nay, as to the partial violent means, I believe that the occurrence of these would not shake the authorities at all, but would strengthen them rather, because they would draw to them the timid of all classes, i.e., all men but a very few.

I have mentioned the two lines on which what I should the methods of impatience profess to work. Before I write a very few words on the only line of method on which some of us can work, I will give my views about the present state of the movement as briefly as I can.

The whole set opinion amongst those more or less touched by Socialism, who are not definite Socialists, is towards the New Trades' Unionism and palliation. Men believe that they can wrest from the capitalists some portion of their privileged profits, and the masters, to judge by the recent threats of combination on their side, believe also that this can be done. That it could only very partially be done, and that the men could not rest there if it were done, we Socialists know very well; but others do not. Let that pass for the present. The Parliamentary side of things seems in abeyance, at present; it has given place to the Trade Union side. But, of course, it will come up again; and in time, if there is nothing to cut across the logical sequence of events, it will achieve the legal Eight Hours' Day—with next to no results either to men or masters.

For the rest, I neither believe in State Socialism as desirable in itself, or, indeed, as a complete scheme do I think it possible. Nevertheless, some approach to it is sure to be tried, and to my mind this will precede any complete enlightenment on the new order of things. The success of Mr. Bellamy's utopian book, deadly dull as it is, is a straw to show which way the wind blows. The general attention paid to our clever friends, the Fabian lecturers and pamphleteers, is not altogether due to their literary ability; people have really got their heads turned more or less in their direction.

Now it seems to me that at such a time, when people are not only discontented, but have really conceived a hope of bettering the condition of labour, while at the same time the means towards their end are doubtful; or, rather, when they take the very beginning of the means as an end in itself,—that this time when people are excited about Socialism, and when many who know nothing about it think themselves Socialists, is the time of all others to put forward the simple principles of Socialism regardless of the policy of the passing hour.

My readers will understand that in saying this I am speaking for those who are complete Socialists—or let us call them Communists. I say for us to make Socialists is the business at present, and at present I do not think we can have any other useful business. Those who are not really Socialists—who are Trades' Unionists, disturbance-breeders, or what not—will do what they are impelled to do, and we cannot help it. At the worst there will be some good in what they do; but we need not and cannot heartily work with them, when we know that their methods are beside the right way.

Our business, I repeat, is the making of Socialists, i.e., convincing people that Socialism is good for them and is possible. When we have enough people of that way of thinking, they will find out what action is necessary for putting their principles in practice. Until we have that mass of opinion, action for a general change that will benefit the whole people is impossible. Have we that body of opinion or any thing like it? Surely not. If we look outside that glamour, that charmed atmosphere of party warfare in which we necessarily move, we shall see this clearly: that though there are a great many who believe it possible to compel their masters by some means or another to behave better to them, and though they are prepared to compel them (by so-called peaceful means, strikes and the like), all but a very small minority are not prepared to do without masters. They do not believe in their own capacity to undertake the management of affairs, and to be responsible for their life in this world. When they are so prepared, then Socialism will be realised; but nothing can push it on a day in advance of that time.

Therefore, I say, make Socialists. We Socialists can do nothing else that is useful, and preaching and teaching is not out of date for that purpose; but rather for those who, like myself, do not believe in State Socialism, it is the only rational means of attaining to the New Order of Things.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

A DEAR GOSPEL.—“Men cease to regard money!” cries Bolus of Houndsditch. What else do all men strive for? The very Bishop informs me that Christianity cannot get on without a minimum of five thousand five hundred in its pocket.—*Carlyle, Past and Present.*

TO THE “PHILANTHROPISTS.”—O Anti-Slavery Convention, loud-sounding, long-eared Exeter Hall!—But in thee too there is a kind of instinct towards justice, and I will complain of nothing. Only, black Quashee over the seas being sufficiently attended to, wilt thou perhaps open thy dull sodden eyes to the “sixty thousand valets in London itself who are yearly dismissed to the streets, to be what they can, when the season ends”; or to the hunger-stricken, pallid, yellow-coloured “Free Labourers” in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Buckinghamshire, and all other shires? . . . Quashee has already victuals and clothing; Quashee is not dying of such despair as the yellow-coloured pale man's.—*Carlyle, Past and Present.*

FALSE REMEDIES FOR POVERTY.

IN all directions, and from nearly all parties of the State, we hear various proposals for the solution of the greatest problem of the time—i.e., the Labour Question. A few short years ago no statesman, and very few indeed connected with politics, would admit that there was such a thing as a labour question at all. We were told by Liberal and Tory alike that we, the Socialists, were merely a set of agitators, who were stumping for notoriety. Even Mr. C. Bradlaugh compared us to a set of dreamers, fools, or worse. But thanks to our steady plodding propaganda since 1880, in the alley and slum, in the hall and park, with voice and leaflet, we have compelled our masters to listen to the voice of the people who have been silent, alas! too long; and true to the order to which our rulers and masters belong, even now they refuse to listen to, or deal with, the truth, but vainly attempt by various schemes (most of which have been tried in other countries) to gull or mislead the people of this country, even as the people on the Continent have been misled and deceived by somewhat similar proposals.

Let us take a sample or two of the proposals—and there are many before us at the present time. The one which seems to meet with most favour is that relating to pensions for worn-out or disabled workers, who are not only to continue to be robbed by the capitalist, but are further expected to contribute from their already scant wages to this pension fund, from which they are to draw a certain sum per week after they are 65 years of age. Considering that the average life of the worker is only 35 in the whole of the country, and in some particular districts—such as London, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, etc.—it is only some 27 years, I would ask workers (who think) is this worth a trial at all so far as they are concerned? I have no hope of its even being a good palliative; as it appears to me, it is only another method of easing the pockets of our masters of their poor-rates; or in other words, our rulers are getting tired of keeping the worn-out human machines, and would fain have the workers compelled (seeing their stone-yard and oakum-picking tests have failed) to insure themselves whilst young in order not to be a burden to the robber class when they are old. The workers are to be docked 1s. per week from about 16 years old to 65, and then to have 10s. per week after that for life. What a glorious prospect for the worn-out decrepid wretch who can contrive to live to 65 years! But, as the immense mass of the workers have no chance of living so long, I cannot see what this precious scheme with its pauper pensions has to do with them. What fools we workers are, and have been, to be misled by every plausible cry, present and past.

The position I take up might seem to the wilfully blind that I have no sympathy with the old, but I think that those who care to study will see that it is much better to end the system (at once) that renders it possible for aged workers to end their days in receipt of charity. Seeing as I do that every able-bodied worker can and does produce three times as much as he consumes, I would warn any worker from expecting any success from this so-called insurance scheme, and would have them bear in mind that its promoters only aim at making it impossible for cases of “extreme hardships” to exist; not “hardship,” mark, but only “extreme hardships”; not a solution of the question, but only a little paint over a worm-eaten beam, which must continue to rot until the burden becomes too great, and then a crash must come.

Well, it may be said, this is only one scheme; there is the new and old unionism, which is securing more comforts for the workers—more wages, less hours, more leisure, all of which will enable the worker to beautify his home, increase his knowledge, and build up the physical condition of himself and family; and all for what?—that he may continue a wage-slave. Nay, I can never believe that; for alongside of the workers unions we have growing up with lightning rapidity the federated unions of the capitalists; and what, pray, is their object? It is, and can only be, to break up or curtail the power of the workers' unions; and does anyone think that this coming battle—the signs of which are already appearing—can end successfully for the workers? I don't believe it will.

Say our critics, these are only two instances. Well, let us take a third. The workers are to get and keep the franchise; which is most difficult, for according to both returning officers in the Eccles division of Lancashire, the number of removals has been something alarming, and with the coming struggle between Labour and Capitalism this evil of removal must increase. But, for the sake of argument, we will suppose the workers get, and do keep, the franchise. Does anyone really believe that they are going to avoid an appeal to force to settle this great question? What do you think the land-holding and capitalist class are made of? Does anyone think they will give up all their monopoly and the power it gives them without a struggle? If there is anyone who believes this I am afraid they are doomed to a sudden and awful awakening to the truth. The only thing worth dying for is freedom; but I am afraid a large number of workers are doomed to lay down their lives for a mere shadow, and all because they are either mentally blind or morally cowards. Is it not wiser, then, to try and find out the truth of the economical position and strengthen the workers' position in the coming struggle by being prepared to raise the cry, “The land for the people, the product to the producer,” and see that there is no petty shuffling for only a part of what belongs to us? “No Compromise” must be written large on our flag, and “No Surrender” be firmly engrafted in heart and head. If the workers are going to fight for anything less than this, then their case is hopeless, because it can only end in disappointment and failure. Isn't this the