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THE WORKINGMAN'S PAPER
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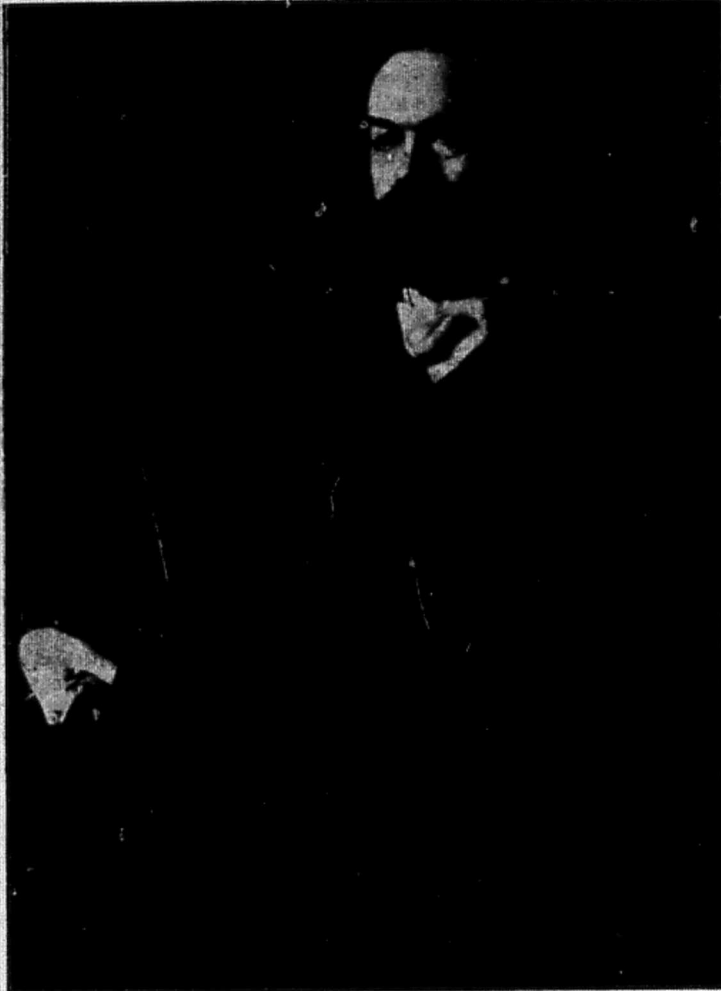


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No. 156

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Contributed to our A B C series by George D. Herron



I know that the term "class consciousness" is offensive to many, both without and within the Socialist movement. I know that it is used in a way that often makes it seem like a tiresome and commonplace cant. Those who do not understand the history of the term, mistake class consciousness for class hatred. None the less, it remains true that until the working class becomes more vividly conscious of itself than it is now, until it realizes that it is the disinherited owner of the world that it builds on its own back, until it understands that there can be no possible identity of interest or reconciliation between itself and the employing or ruling class, its struggle toward emancipation will be blind and unintelligent, betrayed and baffled and compromised, and without that nobility and comprehension which should mark the greatest cause to which man has ever been summoned. In meeting the issues of life and society, we must begin with fact and not with sentiment. The class question is not as to whether we like to have classes or not; the question is: Are there classes in society as now constituted? And is the present constitution of society founded upon the division of the people into classes? And do class antagonisms and social destruction inhere in the nature of a class society? No one disputes the affirmative answer to this question. Not even the most horrified and sophisticated opponent of the idea of the class struggle can deny the fact of the class structure of existing society. And if I am to do anything whatever, even as a social coral-builder, toward making the world equally good and resourceful and lovely for all men, I must begin with the fact that all we know of as civilization, up to the present time, has been the institutionalized expression and defense of one class of people living off another class. There are no words that can make hideous and ghastly enough, or vivid and revolutionary enough, this fact that society and its institutions are organized for the purpose of enabling some people to live off of other people—the few to live off the many. There is no language realistic enough, or possessed of sufficient integrity, to lay bare the chasm between the possessing class and the producing class; between the class that works and the class that reaps the fruits of that work; between the class that is the grist for the great world-mill of economic might and the class that harvests the grist. And until the working class becomes conscious of itself as the only class that has a right to be, until the man who is down and bound understands that he is exploited and bound by the power which his own unpaid labor places in the hands of the capitalist, until we all clearly see that what we call civilization is but the organized and legalized robbery of the common labor, until we have a revolutionizing comprehension of the fact that our churches and governments, our arts and literatures, our educations and philosophies, our morals and manners, are all more or less expressions and deformities of this universal robbery, building themselves and drawing their life and motives upon and out of the vitals of the man who is down and unprivileged, out of his unpaid labor and exhausted life—until then, I say, our dreams and schemes of a common good or a better society are but phillistine utopias, our social and industrial reforms but self-deceit, and our weapons but the shadows of stupidity of hypocrisy. A civilization that is fundamentally parasitical, that has its birth and breath and being in the power of one class to take what another class produces, cannot be so reformed or added to as to bring forth economic justice or any kind of emancipation; or so ordered as to procure equality of opportunity and free individuality.

It is not a question of individuals that we are discussing—not the distinction which our vulgar and brutal moralists make between the so-called good and the so-called bad; it is a question of the quality of civilization. I am defining or characterizing the civilization we now have as a universal or impersonal beast of prey, expressing the power of the ruling and possessing class to absorb and to convert into ever-increasing power to absorb, the whole output of the life and labor of humanity. There have never existed other than predatory civilizations, up to the present time; and their institutions and morals and creeds have but served to keep the people submissive to the depredations of the ruling class. To this end have the powers that might happen to be at any given time always been invested with the superstition, menace and hypocrisy of a divine origin.

Yet strip possessing class institutions of their vestures of fraud and force and you behold only the stolid or cunning parasite. Take the standing arm-

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RICHMOND STRIKE—INSIDE NEWS

National Headquarters Socialist Party, Omaha, Neb., July 25, 1903.

Comrade John Catrell reports further to the national headquarters upon the street car strike at Richmond, Va., under date of July 19th:

The strike situation is unchanged; the men are still firm. The laws are still violated by the company, for while the cars in operation are few in number, the deficiency is made up by excessive speed. Previous to the strike the union men were heavily fined for excessive speed, and if not suitably attired were laid off, on complaint of police force, for seven or ten days.

Now the "scabs" are running cars with hardly enough clothes to cover their nakedness. They are the toughest specimens I have ever seen. I saw two of them attired in balbriggan underwear, no coat, no shirt and no socks, smoking cigarettes, flooding the car with vile tobacco spit, and with "quids" of tobacco strewn the floor. All this in plain violation of the ordinances.

Last week one of the cars, running at excessive speed, ran into a little girl, who was picked up by the fender. The motorman applied the hand brakes without shutting off the power, and the car failed to stop. A young man ran up, caught the front end of the car and rescued the girl, who was taken to the doctor's. The motorman proceeded unmolested.

Last week the company planned a

(Continued on Page 4)

ies of the world, with their millions of men taken from productive labor to be supported by the labor of others, and compelled to serve and revere a glorified criminality—for certainly nothing is so low in the scale of human occupations, so loathsome and really cowardly, as the modern military, with its plinies of loot and murder. Take this military system, and look at it, and consider whence it comes. What are its guns and navies, its bespangled officers and bedizened ranks? They are the forcibly withheld and parasitically consumed labor of the laborer. That which glitters on the officers' shoulder-straps is the unpaid labor of the consumptive girl in the sweatshop, or of the miner in the Virginia coal mines. The annual riot of capitalist lawlessness, the annual orgy and pandemonium of capitalist prostitution, that breaks out at Washington and yet solemnly commands the sacred respect of seventy millions of people—whence and what are its power, its disposal of the affairs of the nation, its billion-dollar disbursements? It is all the unpaid and ravished labor of the laborer. It is unpaid labor that towers in the steeples of our churches, that sits in our legislatures, that builds palaces on the avenues, that blossoms in our shameless fashions, that drones in our academies and rituals, that produces our war novels and our insipid poetry, that raises our shameless ideals of "the strenuous life," or sings in Mr. Kipling's brute heroics. Our poisoned thoughts, our petty and servile motives of life, the very air we breathe, are but the color or movement of this unpaid labor. Our civilization and all the civilizations that have been are but institutionalized unpaid labor, organized and glorified for the purpose of keeping labor unpaid and submissive. As I have said, there are no words red and living enough in human experience to state this fact. There is no power in the human tongue—no dynamic in the human pen, that can portray the awfulness of a world that builds its glorious and its gods, its temples of trade and law and religion,

TEDDY NO EXCEPTION

An Admirer of Teddy gets a Shock

DID YOU EXPECT ANYTHING DIFFERENT?



WILL UNION MEN STILL VOTE FOR "TEDDY"?

Washington, D. C., July 20.—Wm. H. Miller, who was removed from the position of assistant foreman in the government printing office because he had been expelled from the bookbinders' union, was reinstated July 13 by President Roosevelt, pending final decision, with the following comment:

"There is no objection to the employees of the government printing office constituting themselves in to a body if they desire to do so, but no rules or resolutions of that union can be permitted to override the laws of the United States, which it is my sworn duty to enforce."

its forms of beauty and sustems of good, upon an economic might that is but conventionalized robbery of the common labor of mankind. The history of the world is but the struggle between unpaid labor and those who possess its fruits; and the struggle must go on until the man who is down shall be purified and enlightened to get up, until the man who works shall have the whole result of his work, until every class but the working class has ceased to be, with every member of that class a creator and a poet, a philosopher and a dreamer, and a soul of endless beauty.

The danger to our American Socialist movement is not that it may array class against class. Our danger is that we may have a Socialist movement that is not class conscious; a Socialist movement that shall concede some identity or reconciliation of interest between labor and parasitism; a Socialist movement that shall accept the enthusiasms of discarded politicians or evangelists, or bow down to the wooden images of middle-class moralists. I am not speaking as a Marxian or a dogmatist, and I know that Socialists may be given to phrases that become a cant quite as repulsive as the cant of religious emotionalism and its orthodoxy. And I know, and am constantly urging, that the Socialist propaganda of Europe will not answer for America without being recast in the spirit and moulds of American experience and history. But I do speak as one who believes that the integrity and achievements of the Socialist movement, that the quality and finality of the freedom and justice it may win for men, will depend upon a comprehensive, patient and noble recognition of the class structure, class antagonisms and parasitical nature of the society that now is. And all this to the end that it may do away with all classes forever, and that there may be one people, with one common joy and well-being, and one strifeless movement toward perfect and universal harmony.

MARRIAGE OF TWO SOCIALISTS.

San Francisco, Cal., July 22. At our last business meeting Local San Francisco was treated to a very pleasant surprise when Comrade Arthur Lewis announced his marriage to Comrade Lena Morrow, who is well known in the State of California. Comrade Lewis has recently arrived here from London, England, but during his short stay he has gained the esteem and respect of Local San Francisco by his staunch adherence and advocacy of the Proletarian cause. Miss Morrow we have known for a long time, and the best we can say is the more we know her the better we like her. The comrades received the news with clapping of hands and hearty expressions of good will. The bride and groom were called on for speeches, which they made amidst great applause. The meeting then adjourned, and Comrade Lewis and wife went home amidst showers of rice and good wishes. Local San Francisco tender the comrades its congratulations, and hopes that this international wedding of England and America will enhance their ability and strength as speakers and workers for the grand cause of International Socialism, and the establishment of the Universal Socialist Republic.

GEORGE S. HOLMES,
WM. COSTLEY,
LESLIE BROWN.

