

IDEALS AND IMMEDIATE SOCIAL PROGRAMMES.

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THERE are hosts of earnest and thoughtful persons who, philosophically speaking, live from hand to mouth—that is, without ideals and high hopes or visions. They may regard ideals as futile and Utopian, or they may simply have failed to form, or evolve, ideals. They have, on the other hand, definite objectives of a practical character, programmes and plans designated to ameliorate social conditions and remove certain recognized evils and wrongs.

There are also little groups of men and women who cherish ideals and are inspired by noble visions, but who have only the vaguest notions concerning the proper way of realizing their ideals and visions. These dreamers often ignore or completely misread the present. They live in the future, as they imagine it, and do nothing to bridge the chasm between the present and that bright future. They lead morally and socially isolated lives. They play no part in the struggles and efforts of their own period.

To be successful, a reform movement must have both an ideal and a programme—a set of proposals to work for in the present and the immediate future. It is hardly necessary to say that the several proposals or items of the programme must all constitute steps *toward* the ideal, not steps *away* from it. Stagnation is possible in social, political and ethical realms, and even retrogression is unfortunately not an infrequent phenomenon in human affairs. But, while we may have to bow to the inevitable, and resignedly hide our time, we need not and do not deliberately incorporate reactionary planks into our reformatory programmes.

In view of the havoc which the world war and its depressing aftermath have played with so many progressive movements and tendencies, it is perhaps advisable to take stock—to pause and ask ourselves what has become of certain social ideals as well as of immediate reform programmes. Has the logic of great events forced

a change in the spirit and tenor of progressive human thought? Has anything been learned, anything forgotten or relinquished, as the result of the war and its reactions and effects?

On the surface, matters social seem to stand about where they stood before 1914. Revolutionary and proletarian communism is a little more arrogant and aggressive than it was before the second, or Bolshevik, revolution in Russia, though as a matter of fact, there is precious little justification for arrogance in the experience of Soviet Russia under tyrannical communism. In Germany and in Hungary, and perhaps also in Italy, the extreme radicalism in the Socialist and Labor movements have been chastened in a measure and have been led to revise their schedules, so to speak. But apart from these developments it cannot be affirmed that the various established schools have shifted or modified their respective positions. The Marxian Socialists have remained Marxian. The Fabians have remained Fabians. The Guild Socialists have gotten hold of a new, fruitful and important idea—long familiar, however, to French and American followers of J. P. Proudhon—the idea of democratizing credit and abolishing the note—issuing monopoly and the virtual banking monopoly, but there is no causal connection between the tragic world war and this discovery. The Conservatives, the Liberals, the Trade Unionists, the Single-Taxers, the Philosophical Anarchists and the Syndicalists are severally writing and acting in their traditional and customary ways. If individual adherents of any of those schools dimly preceive that their dogmas require re-examination and revision, party loyalty and party pride prevent them from acknowledging their doubts and anxieties.

But there are always independent thinkers in the world, and more than ever at this critical juncture in human affairs. There are hosts of Liberals and even Radicals who have no axes to grind, no dogmas to uphold in the face of unpleasant facts, no factions or schools to support in obedience to misdirected loyalty or a fanatical consistency. These thinkers have learned something from the world war, and from certain pre-war phenomena that perhaps were not fully understood in reform circles until lately. These thinkers realize keenly that social ideas are not self-executory, and that sighing, longing, preaching, and scolding will not bring us a step nearer to our ideal or goal. They realize, further, that the present social order is neither dead nor sick unto death, but, on the contrary, enjoys sufficient health and vitality to last for many decades,

if not centuries, more, and that the course of wise, sober-minded and practical idealists is pretty clearly indicated by the stern logic of facts—positive as well as negative.

There are certain things, the independent students feel, which the men and women we know *will not do*. There is no excuse for persisting in agitations which have impossible objectives. It is idle to hug delusions and to hope against hope. Rational progressives abandon or modify proposals that time has tried and found wanting in the qualities that capture the imagination, convince the intellect or win the heart.

To be specific, it is now clear to independent observers that Marxian revolutionary Socialism is as obsolete or moribund as that Utopian, sentimental Socialism which it superseded and so mercilessly derided. It is equally clear that Tolstoyan Christian Communist-Anarchism has had its day. Even the Henry George Single Tax movement is steadily losing ground and there is no reason to expect a new lease of life for it. These and other movements should be "liquidated". They belong to history. Let the dead bury the dead.

But social ideals remain, and new programmes, adapted to new modes and habits of thought, answering to present needs, are beginning to emerge. It would be rash to assert that these programmes are criticism proof, time-proof. They, too, may undergo changes, revision upward or downward. But for the present they seem to hold the field.

Let us glance at some of them.

The first to challenge attention, beyond question, is the co-operative programmes of farmers and wage-workers organizations. Though the co-operative movement is by no means young, new vitality has been breathed into it in recent years, and literally hundreds of thousands of men and women have been aroused to its importance, its philosophical soundness, its combination of idealism and solid, practical sense. Radicals who used to sneer at this movement—it was too slow, or too "bourgeois", or too prosaic for them—now study it and speak of it with genuine respect. On the other hand, conservatives who thought it incompatible with a sturdy Anglo-Saxon individualism, or with the American spirit of the Frontier, now see in it the only means of economic salvation.

And no wonder. Facts and conditions, not theories, govern men's minds. Waste is a stubborn fact in modern industrial and commercial life, and society cannot afford waste. Waste is stupid

and criminal. It can be eliminated by co-operation, co-ordination, efficient management. Distributive co-operation not unnaturally precedes other forms of co-operation. It represents the line of least resistance. But co-operation in production in the storage of commodities, in insurance against loss by hail or rain or drought, and in the creation and utilization of credit, one cannot doubt, is bound to follow—is already following.

We hear of small co-operative factories started by labor unions or by groups of individual workmen educated in unions. We hear of more ambitious co-operative plans in the more intellectual circles of organized labor. In every labor platform one now finds a plank advocating co-operation.

As for the embattled agricultural associations, state and national, the impetus which the deflation or slump that followed the termination of the artificial prosperity of the war period has given to co-operation as a remedy for farmers' ills hardly needs emphasizing. It is true that many farmers have looked to the government for temporary aid and relief in the form of loans, credits, improved machinery for the stimulation of exports, and the like. It is true that there has even been a tendency to revert to fiat-money fallacies. But these are ephemeral things. There is abundant evidence on every hand that American farmers, and the enlightened urban friends of the farmers as well, have at last perceived the beneficial possibilities of co-operation. The Non-Partisan League of North Dakota may have made serious mistakes in its alleged one-sided exploitation of the co-operative principle at the expense of the general body of taxpayers. Compulsory co-operation through the state always has provoked and always will provoke discontent, for certain elements of the electorate are forced to pay, or believe they are forced to pay, for privileges conferred on special classes. But whether the League is open to criticism or not, the essence of its platform is co-operation. Voluntary co-operation can serve every purpose which compulsory co-operation is intended to serve, and it is less precarious and less dependent on the tides of politics.

Co-operation, it may be noted, was the soul of good even in the most "heretical" of the grange and Populist demands. Many of the farmers' spokesmen said "cheap money" when what they really sought was democratized credit. Many demanded state elevators and state warehouses when what they wanted or aimed at, half consciously, was co-operative construction and use of such

essential facilities. It is not unnatural for farmers, or wage-workers, to turn to the state and ask its aid; for other classes are doing this and have done it ever since the state was first organized. Men think of the state as a co-operative agency, not stopping to distinguish between the compulsory co-operation it exemplifies and voluntary co-operation, and not realizing that taxation of minorities by majorities, even within the four corners of the law, may provoke just resentment.

If, however, as recent developments indicate, farmers and wage-workers alike are becoming aware of the fact that the possibilities of voluntary co-operation are vastly greater than those of compulsory, state-backed co-operation, and that if states put unfair, unwarranted obstacles in the way of the former, as some of them do, it is easier to remove such obstacles than to disarm opposition to state ownership and operation of industrial plants, we may expect rapid and world-wide progress in co-operation.

It is but just to acknowledge the debt of the co-operative movement to the Syndicalist and Guild-Socialist schools of radicalism. Orthodox State Socialism had no message for organized labor; the Syndicalists and Guild-Socialists, by insisting on workers', not state, control, of industry have directed the attention of hundreds of intelligent and imaginative labor leaders to the necessity of fitting workmen for "self determination", for democratic industry, for the exercise of the functions now discharged by capitalists and managers. The new social order must find labor ready, and the work of preparing and disciplining labor cannot begin too soon. "Teaching by doing" is an idea that appeals to all thinking persons, and if labor is to manage industry tomorrow, it had better undertake management today wherever possible. From this to the idea that organized labor might take over factories by agreement with employers, or build factories, or purchase stocks and mortgages and thus acquire interests in plants and establishments, the step is a short one. We find trade unions, for the first time, evincing a deep interest in the question of undertaking the management of factories, or using their friends for such purposes instead of viewing them solely as "war chests" to be used in times of strikes and lockouts.

Now, no tendency is healthier than this—the assumption by labor of the functions and responsibilities of management as well as of the investment of the collective and individual savings of wage-workers in the enterprises that, according to advanced ideas, are

ultimately to be socialized. It is a familiar complaint that managers, though only superior employees, have little sympathy with the rank and file and often indeed are more "plutocratic" than the capitalists in their attitude. Why should not labor train managers, then, and why should it not supply the capital needed in productive industry? If capital is only "surplus value", the fruits of expropriation and exploitation, as certain Socialists hold, why should not labor retain this surplus value wherever it can do so? If, on the other hand, capital under normal and fair conditions, at any rate, is entitled to some reward as an independent and indispensable factor in production, as many individualists contend, why should not labor earn in addition to wages the compensation claimed by capital where it possesses the capital and is able to spare it?

There was a time when Socialists rather metaphysically talked about an "iron law of wages" that precluded any substantial savings by the wage-workers. This notion is no longer entertained by thinking persons. Labor is not limited to a "bare subsistence". Labor is not "getting poorer". Labor saves and invests. Labor supplies capital by the hundreds of millions to industry and commerce. It supplies it indirectly, through saving banks, insurance companies, and the like. Speculative finance has been accused, with ample reason and justice, of using wage-workers' money to injure and defraud them. Labor is no longer under the necessity of intrusting its savings to speculative financiers. It can establish its own banks and finance its own enterprises. The capitalist system is not a close corporation. Labor is free to compete with capital in the latter's own sphere. It must learn to do this—it *is* learning to do it. And how infinitely superior such a policy is to a propaganda of destruction and chaos!

Turning from farmer-labor circles to those of the employing class, we shall not fail to note heartening signs of the times in that quarter. There is, for example, Lord Leverhulme of England, who is persistently advocating the "six-hour day", or rather the six-hour shift, for human labor and more intensive use of machinery, as well as "co-partnership", or co-operation, in some form or other appropriate to given industries and local conditions. Lord Leverhulme is a successful man of business, an employer of thousand of workers, and he has applied his doctrines in his own establishments. He disclaims philanthropic motives; he approaches industrial problems from the viewpoint of a practical but broad-minded and forward man. He is a champion of efficiency in industry, but he per-

ceives that under the wage relation and the handicaps imposed upon the mass of workers efficiency is an idle dream. A short workday and a direct "stake" to labor in industry are, he urges, the only means of enhancing efficiency and eliminating the many forms of waste in the processes of production, distribution and exchange.

Germany, or Germany's capitalistic and employing class, has produced an even more remarkable and picturesque figure than Lord Leverhulme—Herr Walter Rathenau, for many years head of the Allgemeine Electricitäts-gesellschaft, and now minister of Reconstruction in the Wirth government of the German republic. Rathenau is no impulsive convert to progressive and radical social-economic ideas. He is the author of a series of spirited, stimulating and thoughtful volumes dealing with the deepest and most anxious problems of modern society. He is at once practical and idealistic, cautious and courageous. He has little respect for doctrinaire Socialists and Utopian reformers, but he is thoroughly alive to the weaknesses and defects of the present politico-economic order and knows how to read the handwriting on the wall. In two little books, *Von Kommenden Dingen* and *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, he has presented his quintessential views as to the conditions precedent to the establishment on secure foundation of a human and just social order.

Mr. Rathenau advances two major proposals. The first he sums up in the formula, "Interchange of Labor". This formula, he writes, "requires that every employee engaged in mechanical work shall have the right to claim to do a portion of his day's work in intellectual employment, and that every brain-worker shall be obliged to devote a portion of his day to physical labor". The second proposal is that "a year of Labor Service be established, the year to be devoted by the whole youth of Germany, of both sexes, to bodily training and work".

Plainly, the second proposal is a corollary from the first, and is intended to make the first practicable. A year of labor service, under the proper conditions, would fit the brain-worker, or the leisure class, for the mechanical and physical work to be required of them.

The arguments elaborately set forth by Mr. Rathenau in support of his two proposals cannot be presented here, even in outline. Suffice it to say that the root of our industrial trouble appears to him to lie in the conditions of toil—the terrible monotony, the lack of joy or interest, the mindlessness and soullessness of the average

“job”. Modern industry, he affirms, dulls and stupefies the human spirit, until the day’s work has been ennobled and *vergeistigt*—invested with a spiritual quality.

Mr. Rathenau’s “year of labor service” reminds one of the late William James’s “moral equivalent of war”—a form of industrial conscription. The James idea fell on barren soil. Americans have little faith in either military or industrial service of the uniform, compulsory kind. But Germany, by reason of her pre-war national discipline and after-war difficulties, should be disposed to entertain the idea of universal industrial service with lively sympathy. If she is destined to become, as many think she is, the leading industrial and trading country in Europe, and to solve her problems without abandoning the cardinal features of the capitalistic and democratic system, she will need the inspiring, invigorating and unifying influences proposed by Mr. Rathenau. A plunge into revolutionary communism would be mad folly, of which the danger is past for Germany. But a too rigid adherence to the one-sided capitalism which Rathenau has weighed and found wanting would be equally fatal in the long run. Capitalism has inherent virtues than can modify and save it, but these virtues must be encouraged and developed by men of vision, sympathy and imagination.

I have just intimated that Rathenau is too radical for American habits of thought, but, after all, there is no little kinship between his advanced ideas and the burden of the recent report on Waste in Industry made by a special committee of distinguished American engineers to the American Engineering Society. This document is symptomatic. It is bold and yet thoroughly constructive. It is “capitalistic” in spirit, but it finds much to condemn in the present economic system and, indirectly, much to justify in the discontent with the system. It shows that labor has serious grievances, though labor is mistaken in thinking that the average employer deliberately exploits his employees. The trouble, or one trouble, with the present system, according to the engineers, is that it is appallingly wasteful. It is supposed to be efficient, and perhaps it is, as compared with slave labor or with bureaucratically directed and managed labor. But from a truly scientific point of view it is neither efficient nor economical. It wastes billions annually. Strikes and lockouts are forms of waste, and so is seasonal unemployment, and so is overtime work at “rush” periods, with inflated wages and long hours for the employees. If industry were properly organized, the billions

now wasted would go in part to labor, in part to the consumer, and in part to management and capital.

The engineer may be disposed to overemphasize the technical and administrative aspects of the industrial problem and to minimize its human aspects. He may assume a simplicity that does not exist in the actual situation and cherish too much confidence in the effect of a dry, intellectual, scientific approach to the problem of industrial relations. But there is no denying the fact that the engineer's approach enlists the interest and sympathy of many who are repelled by the social reformer and the humanitarian, whom it is easy to dismiss as visionaries and closest students.

Finally, never in modern history has as much stress been laid as now on the necessity of decent living conditions, adequate housing, popular education and wholesome recreation. Not all the liberal thinkers and statesmen of the world may agree with Mr. Bertrand Russell in the proposition that poverty can be abolished in twenty years if there be the will to do so. But many realize as never before that modern society, with its science, technique, art and organizing genius, has no excuse for tolerating slums, insanitary dwellings, parasitic industries and wage scales that absolutely precluded a human standard of living. During the tragic world war there was no unemployment and no misery among those able and willing to work. Why, men and women are asking everywhere, cannot society achieve the same results under peace conditions? War destroys wealth, and peace conserves it. Cannot society produce enough of the necessaries and comforts of life when all are engaged in *creating* wealth and accumulating capital? War brings an artificial and deceptive prosperity: cannot men, by taking thought, insure themselves a genuine and healthy prosperity—a prosperity based on useful labor, co-operation, equal opportunity and intelligent utilization of nature's abundant resources?

To put such questions as these insistently and earnestly is to answer them in the affirmative. The war may have destroyed illusions and dogmatic social creeds, but it has stimulated searching re-examination of the principles of social and economic organization and constructive thinking about the ways and means of setting the house of civilization in order and removing the prolific causes of strife, internecine and other disturbances.