
Moving Toward Socialism (August 30, 1904)

A few years ago the socialist philosophy was spurned as irrational and impossible and its exponents were looked upon as foolish fanatics by thoughtful men in the United States.

During the last decade a profound change has taken place with reference to socialism. Many thousands who once rejected it with scorn are now among its staunch supporters. Newspapers, magazines, and periodicals are discussing it; rulers, statesmen, and politicians are worried about it; ministers, teachers, and moralists are descanting upon it, and every day it becomes more and more apparent that a new and vital problem has presented itself.

The change in the popular mind in regard to socialism is not due solely, or even mainly, to mental processes. The many "converts" to the socialist philosophy may not credit their intellectual faculties alone for seeing the light, but are indebted primarily, as a rule, to economic necessity, the growing insecurity in the means of making a livelihood as the result of the concentration of capital and other changes in the economic structure of society that are rapidly transforming our boasted republic into an industrial despotism.

No greater mistake was ever made than to suppose that socialism is a dream and that "human nature" must be excluded before it can be realized. It is just because "human nature" is as it is that socialism is inevitable.

Socialism is neither a dream nor a scheme, but a theory of society based upon the principles of social evolution, the trend of which is so clearly indicated in the changes daily taking place before our very eyes that the wonder is that any man with the ordinary power of observation can fail to see that the economic foundations of society are shaping for a superstructure of socialism, and that it will be socialism because it can be nothing else.

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Not long after the congressional elections of 1902 the Rev. Lyman Abbott, taking notice of the great increase in the Socialist vote, said: "Socialism is inevitable." In a lecture recently delivered the same eminent divine rudely disturbed the calm in conservative circles by saying:

Our industries must be democratized; if different small bodies of men are to control all our domestic necessities, where goes our democracy? The democratizing of industry means the distribution of wealth. The labor problem can never be solved as long as one set of men owns the tools (machinery) and another set uses them. When all those connected with one industry become together owners and users, then will come the harmony and union which have been so long striven for.

The economics of socialism are embodied in this revolutionary utterance. Production of wealth is now a social function and the means of production must be socially owned unless society is to disintegrate and civilization to turn backward toward barbarism.

The toolless worker is an industrial slave.

The tool-owning capitalist is an industrial master.

They are the dominant types of commercial society. They represent two powerful and antagonistic classes. there can be no permanent peace between them. The intervals of quiet are but breathing moments between outbreaks. Their economic interests are irreconcilable.

The violent and bloody upheaval in Colorado proves it.

The gruesome packing trades strike in Chicago bears witness to it.¹

The Citizens' Alliance and the trade union movement are the incarnation of it.

There is war between them to the death.

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Workers at last are waking. The cry that there are "no classes" in this country deceives them no longer. It is true that President Roosevelt anathematizes the demagogues who "array class against class in the American republic," but it is barely possible that within a generation of two the demagogues and demigods of this day may exchange places.

The mine slaves of Pennsylvania are not in the same class with Harry Lehrⁱⁱ and William Waldorf Astor,ⁱⁱⁱ President Roosevelt to the contrary notwithstanding.

The development of the capitalist system has produced economic classes and arrayed them against each other in every civilized land on earth, be it autocratic Russia, monarchic Germany, or free America. They differ only in degree of development. In the presence of this worldwide evolution, to charge individuals with arraying these two classes against each other is like accusing the whitecaps on the crests of stirring up the mighty deep.

David M. Parry is doing as much to array class against class as any other individual, though he aims at the opposite effect.

The slave owners of the South were the chief instrumentalities in their own overthrow. The tool owners of capitalism are being shaped for similar ends.

The late Senator Hanna was discerning enough to foresee what was coming when he predicted that the great struggle of the future would be between the Republican Party and the Socialists. It requires rare discrimination to choose between the Republican and Democratic parties. Ninety percent of the voters could not tell the platforms apart. There is scarcely an issue between them and certainly none, nor the shadow of one, so far as the working class is concerned.

Political parties express the economic interests of classes. The Republican Party represents the dominant capitalist class, the Democratic Party the small capitalists. The latter are being worsted as a class and their party is tottering on its foundations. It is today in all essential respects a Republican party. This is all that holds it together and even in spite of this it is disintegrating.

As the middle class crumbles the Democratic Party tumbles.

In the coming phases of the class struggle there will be room for but two parties — namely, a working class party and a capitalist class party. The capitalists know that this political alignment is fatal to them and are doing all in their power to prevent it. But they are pitted against the inexorable laws of industrial evolution and sooner or later the alignment will be made and the working classes will triumph over their exploiters.

The Republican and Democratic parties have united at every point where the one or the other was menaced by Socialist success. These are infallible signs of the coming political alignment based upon economic

class interest. The capitalists will go to the Republican Party and the workers to the Socialist Party. The Democratic Party will go out of business.

The waked-up workers of the country say it is a class struggle. The capitalists deny it. Every day's development emphasizes it. It is so clearly revealed in the packinghouse strike that only the purblind fail to see it. The capitalists are one. So are the workers. Their opposing economic interests separate them. What one gains is at the loss of the other.

Upon that basis they will sooner or later meet on the political battlefield.

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Every defeat on economic grounds recruits the army on the political field. Trade unionists take their final degree in the Socialist Party.

Capitalists are shortsighted when they rejoice over the success of a lockout or the defeat of a strike. When the capitalists have won strikes enough the Socialists will have votes enough to retire them from business.

The armies of workers are becoming organized not only as a union of labor but, what is more, as a party of the working class. They need only to become conscious of their power as a class to abolish every form of servitude and rule the world.

The workers are just learning to vote as they strike — as a class and against the class that exploits them. They are being forced by economic necessity into consciousness of their class interests and in that ratio the Socialist Party is growing. Four years ago the Socialist Party was credited with less than 100,000 votes. There will be an extraordinary increase this year.

Capitalist prosperity has reached its limit. Hard times are setting in. The vast surplus that labor produces, and that labor needs but can not buy, periodically congests the market and then labor has to go idle, hungry, and naked until the surplus can be worked off. Production for use verses production for profit is the only remedy.

Men are better than millionaires and mendicants. Homes are better than castles and hovels. Freedom is better than despotism; and freedom for all is the mission of the socialist movement.

Capitalism has almost run its course. The old system is breaking down. The Colorado and Chicago^{iv} eruptions are symptoms of the degeneration

that has attacked the body economic of the capitalist system and these eruptions are apt to spread over the entire body.

There is no cause for alarm. Society is but reconstructing itself and the process is eternal. These are transition days — eventful, stirring, and full of promise for the working class and all mankind.

As long as there is a “working class” and a “labor market” there will be class conflict that will preclude social peace. When all are useful workers and all have equal opportunity to produce wealth and enjoy it there will be no classes and no animal struggle for existence.

This will be only when the workers own the tools and secure wealth for themselves. To procure these they must first secure control of government and this is why the labor question is essentially a political question. When the working class succeeds to political power it will be easy to put the workers in possession of their tools and emancipate them from wage-slavery.

Industrial self-government is necessary to political self-government and both are vital to a free nation.

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ⁱ Slaughterhouse workers and meat processing workers went on strike on July 12, 1904. Twenty thousand workers walked out on Armour, Swift, and five other large meat packing concerns in Chicago, joined by nearly 13,000 in Kansas City and 23,000 others across the Midwest. An attempt at speedy settlement of the work stoppage through arbitration failed and the battle continued through the entire month of August and into September, with strikebreakers employed and the cost of meat to consumers escalating as available supplies dwindled.

ⁱⁱ Henry Symes “Harry” Leher (1869-1929) was a prominent Baltimore socialite known for his staging of elaborate parties.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Waldorf Astor (1848-1919), a New York Republican politician and philanthropist, was the only child of millionaire financier John Jacob Astor III (1822-1890).

^{iv} That is, the packinghouse strike.