

Workers' Breadnought

FOR GOING TO THE ROOT.

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WEEKLY.

THE VIEWS OF PROUDHON.

By Sylvia Pankhurst.

The Freedom Press is to be congratulated upon the re-publication of P. J. Proudhon's "General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century,"* originally published in 1851.

Proudhon's exposition of capitalist society as he saw it at that time is remarkably true and vivid, and we cannot fail to read it with interest and appreciation, though we must differ from him strongly in a great part of his conclusions. We differ emphatically from his desire to retain private ownership and petty trading banks, etc., on a basis of petty capitalism. On the other hand, his denunciation of the tyranny of majority rule and of the centralised bureaucracy advocated by the State Socialists is unanswerable, and the industrial Communism of the future must avoid the evils he justly condemns if it is to provide a satisfactory social basis.

Proudhon's ironical advice to the reactionaries, if they desire to retain their power, is interesting. He says to them:—

"It will be necessary, if you expect your work to stand:

- (1) To declare the state of siege general, absolute, and for an unlimited time;
- (2) To decree the deportation beyond the seas of a hundred thousand individuals;
- (3) To double the effective strength of the army, and to keep it constantly on a war footing;
- (4) To increase the garrisons and the police, to arm all the fortresses, to build in each district a strong castle, to interest the military in the reaction by making the army an endowed and ennobled caste, which can partly recruit itself;
- (5) To rearrange the people in corporations of arts and crafts, no one accessible to any other; to suppress free competition; to create in commerce, industry, agriculture, property, finance, a privileged class which will join hands with the aristocracy of the army and the Church.
- (6) To expurgate or burn nine-tenths of the books in the libraries, books of science, philosophy, and history, and to do away with every vestige of the intellectual movement for four centuries; to commit the direction of studies and the archives of civilisation to the Jesuits exclusively;
- (7) To increase the taxes two hundred million dollars, and issue new loans in order to cover these expenses; and to erect a special and inalienable privilege for the support of the new nobility, as well as of the churches, seminaries, and convents."

In his seventh point Proudhon shows that he understood the importance to reaction of creating a strong state, and the reaction in all Europe has certainly done what he suggested in this respect.

Proudhon's fifth point is still more striking. The privileged trading class, which would join hands with the aristocracy of the army and the Church, has long been an immense factor in our midst. The Stock Exchange and the big business enterprises are now as much the profession of the aristocrat as the Church and the army, though it was not so in Proudhon's day.

Remarkable, too, is his advice to the reaction "to arrange the people in corporations of arts and crafts, no one accessible to any other."

The craft unions which display so conspicuous a lack of solidarity the one with the other, and break up the unity of the working class, are here visualised for us.

Analysing the Revolution of 1789, Proudhon justly says:—

"The feudal order having been abolished on the night of the 4th of August, and the principles of liberty and civil equality proclaimed, the consequence was that in future society must be organised, not for politics and war, but for work. What in fact was the feudal organisation? It was one entirely military. What is work? The negation of fighting. To abolish feudalism, then, meant to commit ourselves to a perpetual peace, not only foreign but domestic. By this single act all the old politics between State and State, all the systems of European equilibrium, were abrogated; the same equality, the same independence, which the Revolution promised to bring about among individuals must exist between nation and nation, province and province, city and city. . . .

"It was evident that the problem of the Revolution lay in erecting everywhere the reign of equality and industry."

Proudhon points out that after the French Revolution there was a considerable impetus in agriculture and industry which in all countries, and especially in our own, was on the eve of new developments. He argues that it was in the field of political economy that the efforts of the Revolution should have been exerted, but this was not understood by those who secured the leadership:—

"All their ideas were of politics only. The counter-revolutionary forces aiding, the revolutionary party, forced for the moment to place itself on the defensive and to organise itself for war, the nation was again delivered into the hands of warriors and lawyers."

All this emphasises for us the need that in the coming social changes that the industrial workers shall be organised at the point of production; able to take charge of the essential services so that they may not fall into the hands of parasitic exploiters.

Proudhon continues:—

"One might say that nobility, clergy, and monarchy had disappeared only to make way for another governing set of Anglomaniac constitutionaries, classic republicans, militaristic democrats, all infatuated with the Romans and Spartans, and, above all, very much so with themselves. On the other hand, caring but very little for the real needs of the country; which, understanding nothing of what was going on, permitted itself to be half destroyed at their leisure, and finally attached itself to the fortune of a soldier. . . . The revolutionaries failed in their mission after the fall of the Bastille, as they have failed since the abdication of Louis Philippe, and for the same reasons: the total lack of economic ideas, their prejudice in favour of government, and the distrust of the lower classes which they harboured. . . .

"... it necessarily followed that the new society, scarcely conceived, should remain in embryo; that, instead of developing according to economic laws, it should languish in constitutionalism; that its life should be a perpetual contradiction, that, in place of the ordinary condition, which is characteristic of it, it should exhibit everywhere systematic corruption and legal inefficiency; finally, that the power which is the expression of this society, reproducing with the most scrupulous fidelity the antimony of its principles, should find itself continually in the position of fighting with the people, and the people in con-

tinual need of attacking power."

Analysing the "chaos of economic forces" that grew up after the Revolution, Proudhon says:—

"I call certain principles of action *economic forces*, such as the division of labour, competition, collective force, exchange, credit, property, etc., which are to labour and to wealth what the destruction of classes, the representative system, monarchical heredity, administrative centralisation, the judicial hierarchy, etc., are to the State."

The characterisation is acute, but as we shall presently observe, Proudhon did not see that what was required to produce an equalitarian society was to sweep away all of these save the division of labour on a basis not of profit making, but of mutual service to secure abundance for all and congenial life and occupation for every individual.

A scathing account of capitalist production in his time is given by Proudhon in words which are still brilliantly apt, though the justification for them has been intensified.

On the division of labour he says:—

"Without division of labour the use of machines would not have gone beyond the most ancient and most common utensils. . . . The French Revolution itself, lacking an outlet, would have been but a sterile revolt; it would have accomplished nothing. But, on the other hand, by division of labour, the product of labour mounts to tenfold, a hundred-fold, political economy rises to the height of philosophy, the intellectual level of nations is continually raised. . . .

"... This economic force was left to all the overturns caused by chance and by interest. The division of labour, becoming always more minute, and remaining without counterpoise, the workman has been given over to a more and more degrading subjection to machinery. That is the effect of the division of labour when it is applied as practised in our days, not only to make industry incomparably more productive, but at the same time to deprive the worker in mind and body of all the wealth which he creates for the capitalist and the speculator."

Proudhon writes as one who sees the factory system growing up, and is able to compare it with the home craftsmanship it is displacing. He quotes also M. de Tocqueville:—

"In proportion to the more complete application of the principle of the division of labour, the workman becomes weaker, more limited, and more dependent."

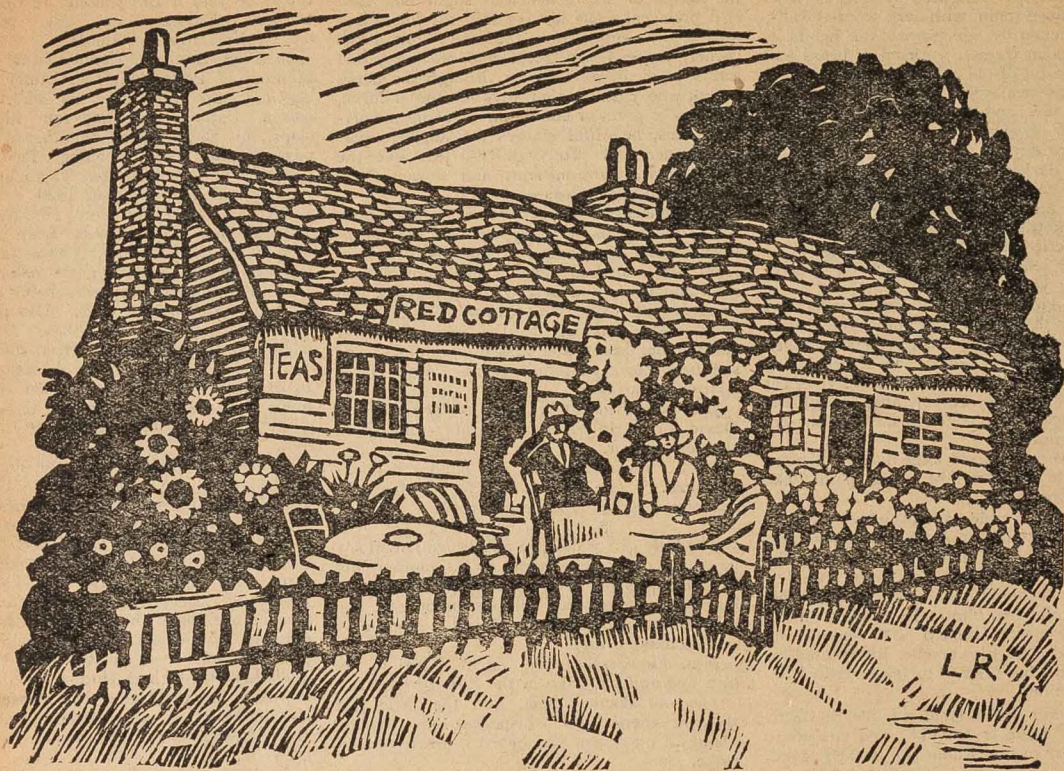
J. B. Say is also quoted:—

"It may be said that the division of labour is a skilful mode of employing the power of man; that it adds prodigiously to the products of society; but that it subtracts something from the capacity of each man taken individually."

The coming of machines, like, for instance, the linotype, which might require as much or more skill in the operator than the hand process, was not visualised by these writers, nor the solidarity of the factory workers. The terrible hardship which the coming of the machines meant to the workers of the time is indicated in the following passages:—

"The more the value of the worker falls, and the demand for labour diminishes, the lower are wages and the greater is poverty. And it is not a few hundreds of men, but millions, who are the victims of this economic perturbation.

* "General Idea of the Revolution."—Freedom Press.



THE RED COTTAGE, 126, High Road, Woodford Wells (opposite Horse and Well Hotel).

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IRISH WORKER LEAGUE.

NEW WORKERS' REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT.—Sunday, 6th, 7.30. Inaugural Irish History Lecture. All welcome. 124, Walworth-road (near "Elephant"). Economics Class forming.

COMMUNIST WORKERS' MOVEMENT, WILLESDEN.

A group of the C.W.M. has been formed in Willesden. Mr. A. Parsons, 182, Chapter Road, Willesden, is acting as Secretary pro tem. Intending members should communicate with him.

COMMUNIST WORKERS MOVEMENT. (Anti-Parliamentary.)

For particulars of membership apply Secretary, 152, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

A Meeting, to form a Branch of the above, will be held in Walworth on Monday, April 7th.

For full particulars see next week's "Dreadnought," or inquire at 152, Fleet Street.

Meetings.

Sundays, 3 p.m., Hyde Park. N. Smyth and others.

The "Workers Dreadnought" may be obtained from Mr. A. Turner, 25, Windmill Lane, Stratford.

A LITERATURE PITCH.

Comrade Mrs. Ironside is organising a literature selling pitch in Oxford Street. Comrades willing to assist are asked to communicate with the "Dreadnought" office in order that we may forward their names to her.

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