

Revolutionary reform

By A. Bruckère

Two tendencies, apparently contradictory, manifest themselves in Socialist tactics on the subject of reforms.

On one hand, the very principle of Socialism is found in opposition to democratic illusions. Instead of seeing the solution of the so-called “social question” in the expansion of *liberties*, in the realisation of an *ideal* of Justice, in the perfecting of the republican regime by means of *universal suffrage*, Socialism declares that all the social phenomena of our days are the results of capitalism, manifestations of the class war, which will cease only with the disappearance of classes. Therefore the Socialist Party is a party of class and of revolution.

On the other hand, the desire for some immediate bettering of his lot is too well engendered in the heart of man for him to lose hope, even against all logic. Logic is weak against the power of an instinctive desire. The political parties promise reforms to their electors just as a nurse promises the moon to a child.

The Socialist Party is thus caught between the logic of its scientific principle and the universal desire for an immediate amelioration—”something now”. It cannot betray its principle, but it is likewise impossible that this party—of men—can escape this *human* desire for reforms.

This contradiction is, however, not without a solution, if we discriminate between the conditions of fighting and the conditions of existence of the working-class.

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The conditions of existence of the wage-workers depends upon their wages. It is not determined by the *legal* law, but by the economic law of supply and demand.

The condition of existence of the wage-workers is determined in each corporate body, by the progress of the development of machinery, the concentration of capital, the proportion of the unemployed industrial reserve army, and the stock-in-trade of merchandise.

Social realities are *outside* of parliaments. The crowd of ambitious folk who jostle one another in the unhealthy atmosphere of the Houses of Parliament can do nothing—absolutely nothing—to modify the real wage of the workers.

The legal law is of straw; the economic law is of iron.

Why change the tax-gathering plate if you do not change what is put into it?

Why agitate against clericalism if clericalism is a social necessity? You do nothing more nor less than substitute idolatry of the flag for that of the cross.

To dream of bettering the conditions of *existence* by political means is Utopia.

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Although the bettering of the conditions of existence by way of political reform is impossible, it is not the same as regards the conditions of fighting, and it appears to us to be possible to make easier the struggle of the proletariat against the capitalist middle-class.

We do not here make a specious distinction. To distinguish between the conditions of fighting and the conditions of existence is not to split a hair. The difference is real.

When a soldier marches under a shower of rain, you better his conditions of existence in giving him an umbrella which protects him from getting wet, and you better his condition of fighting in supplying him with an up-to-date rifle instead of a stone-slinger.

By the very fact of capitalist production the proletariat is at war with the bourgeoisie. This struggle is sometimes hidden, at other times visible to the eyes of all, but it is without truce. Far from becoming less evident, conflicts increase daily. Some reforms would render the attacks of the proletariat more powerful, those of its adversary weaker, and would make the effort easier and more efficient.

One reform which is considered above all others as an amelioration of the conditions of carrying on the proletarian struggle is the reduction in the hours of labour.

The reduction in the hours of the working day makes the workers mentally and physically stronger and better equipped for carrying on the social struggle. Rebels are not made of the starved and wretched: rebellion is a luxury.

The reduction of the working-day facilitates the concentration of capital, thereby hastening the disappearance of the middle-class, making clearer the social struggle.

That is the revolutionary reform *par excellence*.

It is not an amelioration in the condition of existence. Applications of the reform already made in England and America prove that the amount of labour furnished is sensibly the same: labour-time diminished, work becomes more intense. The proportion of surplus labour is perhaps greater: the 8 hours day probably increasing the relative surplus-value would thereby increase the capitalist profits.

The 8 hours day is an amelioration of the conditions of fighting—nothing more. It is an immense gain.

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The moment the Trade Unions take up the agitation in favour of the 8 hours day, of which Socialism hitherto took the initiative, when “labour” elected candidates will have introduced themselves into ministerial combinations and lose all thought of economic realities in the reforms *pour rire* of which the Radicals are so prodigious—the Socialist Party cannot, in my opinion, but find it profitable to direct

its efforts towards the reduction of the hours of labour.

Without seeking to discover to-day what is the value of Parliamentary action to obtain this revolutionary reform, we will attempt to show in another article how it is possible to draft a law effectively reducing the working-day, because the difficulty does not consist in having a law passed, but in having it applied.

(translated from *Le Socialiste*)

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