

Independent
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The Class Struggle

Mr. London is the author of "The Call of the Wild" and a number of stories of the Klondike region which have placed him among the most popular of American writers. He is more than a literary man, however, being a student at first hand of social problems, as his latest book, "The People of the Abyss," will show. He is a Socialist. The following article is the best statement we have yet seen, from the radical standpoint, of the industrial and social conflict of classes.—EDITOR.

FOR a class struggle to exist in society there must be, first, a class inequality, a superior class and an inferior class (as measured by power); and, second, the outlets must be closed whereby the strength and ferment of the inferior class have been permitted to escape. That there are even classes in the United States is vigorously denied by many; but it is incontrovertible, when a group of individuals is formed, wherein the members are bound together by common interests, which are peculiarly their interests and not the interests of individuals outside the group, that such a group is a class. The owners of capital, with their dependents, form a class of this nature in the United States; the working people form a similar class. The interest of the capitalist class, say, in the matter of income tax, is quite contrary to the interest of the laboring class; and, *vice versa*, in the matter of poll tax.

If between these two classes there be a clear and vital conflict of interest, all the factors are present which make a class struggle; but this struggle will lie dormant if the strong and capable members of the inferior class be permitted to leave that class and join the ranks of the superior class. The capitalist class and the working class have existed side by side and for a long time in the United States; but, hitherto, all the strong, energetic members of the working class have been able to rise out of their class and become owners of capital. They were enabled to do this because an undeveloped country with an expanding frontier gave equality of opportunity to all. In the almost lottery-like scramble for the ownership of the vast unowned natural resources, and in the exploitation of which there was little or no competition of capital (the capital itself arising out of the exploitation), the capable, intelligent member of the working class found a field in which to use his brains to his own advancement. Instead of being discontented in direct ratio with his intelligence and ambitions, and of radiating among his fellows a spirit of revolt as capable as he was capable, he left them to their fate and carved his own way to a place in the superior class.

But the day of an expanding frontier, of a lottery-like scramble for the ownership of natural resources, and of the upbuilding of new industries, is past. Further West has been reached, and an immense volume of surplus capital roams for investment and nips in the bud the patient efforts of the embryo capitalist to rise through slow increment from small beginnings. The gateway of opportunity after opportunity has been closed, and closed for all time.

Rockefeller has shut the door on oil, the American Tobacco Company on tobacco, and Carnegie on steel. After Carnegie came Morgan, who triple-locked the door. These doors will not open again, and before them pause thousands of ambitious young men to read the placard: No Thoroughfare.

And day by day more doors are shut, while the ambitious young men continue to be born. It is they, denied the opportunity to rise from the working class, who preach revolt to the working class. Had he been born fifty years later, Andrew Carnegie, the poor Scotch boy, might have risen to be president of his union, or of a federation of unions, but that he would never have become the builder of Homestead and the founder of multitudinous libraries is as certain as it is certain that some other man would have developed the steel industry had Andrew Carnegie never been born.

Theoretically, then, there exist in the United States all the factors which go to make a class struggle. There are the capitalist and working classes, the interests of which conflict; while the working class is no longer being emasculated to the extent it was in the past by having drawn off from it its best blood and brains. Its more capable members are no longer able to rise out of it and leave the great mass leaderless and helpless. They remain to be its leaders.

When a million and more of men, finding themselves knit together by certain interest peculiarly their own, band together in a strong organization for the aggressive pursuit of those interests, it is evident that society has within it a hostile and warring class. But when the interests which this class aggressively pursues conflict sharply and vitally with the interests of another class, class antagonism arises and a class struggle is the inevitable result. One great organization of labor alone has a membership of 1,250,000 in the United States. This is the American Federation of Labor, and outside of it are many other large organizations. All these men are banded together for the frank purpose of bettering their condition, regardless of the harm worked thereby upon all other classes. They are in open antagonism with the capitalist class, while the manifestos of their leaders state that the struggle is one which can never end.

Their leaders will largely deny this last statement, but an examination of their utterances, their actions and the situation will forestall such denial. In the first place, the conflict between labor and capital is over the division of the joint product. Capital and labor apply themselves to raw material and make it into a finished product. The difference between the value of the raw material and the value of the finished product is the value they have added to it by their joint effort. This added value is, therefore, their joint product, and it is over the division of this joint product that the struggle between labor and capital takes place. Labor takes its share in wages; capital takes its share in profits. It is patent, if capital took, in profits, the whole joint product, that labor would perish. And it is equally patent, if labor took, in wages, the whole joint product, that capital would perish. Yet this last is the very thing labor aspires to do, and that it will never be content with anything less than the whole joint product is evidenced by the words of its leaders.

Mr. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, has said:

“The workers want more wages; more of the comforts of life; more leisure; more chance for self-improvement as men, as trade unionists, as citizens. *These were the wants of yesterday; they are the wants of to-day; they will be the wants of to-morrow, and of to-morrow’s morrow.* The struggle may assume new forms, but the issue is the immemorial one—an effort of the producers to obtain an increasing measure of the wealth that flows from their production.”

Mr. Henry White, secretary of the United Garment Workers of America, and a member of the Industrial Committee of the National Civic Federation, speaking of the National Civic Federation soon after its inception, said:

“To fall into one another’s arms, to avow friendship, to express regret at the injury which has been done, would not alter the facts of the situation. Workingmen will continue to demand more pay, and the employer will naturally oppose them. The readiness and ability of the workmen to fight will, as usual, largely determine the amount of their wages or their share in the product. . . . But when it comes to dividing the proceeds, there is the rub. We can also agree that the larger the product through the employment of laborsaving methods, the better, as there will be more to be divided, but again the question of the division. . . . A Conciliation Committee, having the confidence of the community and composed of men possessing practical knowledge of industrial affairs, can therefore aid in mitigating this antagonism, in preventing avoidable conflicts, in bringing about a *truce*—I use the word *truce* because understandings can only be temporary.”

Man being man and a great deal short of angels, the quarrel over the division of the joint product is irreconcilable. For the last twenty years in the United States there has been an average of over a thousand strikes per year; and year by year these strikes increase in magnitude and the front of the labor-army grows more imposing. And it is a class struggle, pure and simple. Labor, as a class, is fighting with capital, as a class.

Workingmen will continue to demand more pay, and employers will continue to oppose them. This is the keynote to *laissez faire*. Everybody for himself and devil take the hindmost. It is upon this that the rampant individualist bases his individualism. It is the let-alone policy, the struggle for existence which strengthens the strong, destroys the weak, and makes a finer and more capable breed of men. But the individual has passed away and the group has come, for better or worse, and the struggle has become, not a struggle between individuals, but a struggle between groups. So the query rises: Has the individualist never speculate upon the labor-group becoming strong enough to destroy the capitalist-groups and take to itself and run for itself the machinery of industry? And, further, has the individualist never speculated upon this being still a triumphant expression of individualism, or group individualism, if the confusion of terms may be permitted?

But the facts of the class struggle are deeper and more significant than have so far been presented. A million or so of workmen may organize for the pursuit of interests which engender class antagonism and strife, and at the same time be unconscious of what is engendered. But when a million or so of workmen show unmistakable signs of being conscious of their class, of being, in short, “class conscious,” then the situation grows serious. The uncompromising and terrible hatred of the trade unionist for a scab is the hatred of a class for a traitor to that class, while the hatred of a trade unionist for the militia is the hatred of a class for a weapon wielded by the class with which it is fighting. No workman can be true to his class and at the same time be a member of the militia—this is the dictum of the labor leaders.

In the town of the writer, the good citizens, when they get up a Fourth of July parade and invite the labor unions to participate, are informed by the unions that they will not march in the parade if the militia marches. Article 8 of the constitution of the Painters’ and Decorators’ Union of Schenectady provides that a member must not be a “militiaman, special police officer, or deputy marshal in the employ of corporation or individuals during strikes, lockouts or other labor difficulties, and any member occupying any of the above positions will be debarred from membership.”

Mr. William Potter was a member of this union and a member of the National Guard. As a result, because he obeyed the order of the Governor when his company was ordered out to suppress rioting, he was expelled from his union. Also his union demanded that his employers,

Shafer & Barry, discharge him from their service. This they complied with, rather than face the threatened strike.

Mr. Robert L. Walker, first lieutenant of the Light Guards, a New Haven militia company, recently resigned. His reason was that he was a member of the Car Builder's Union, and that the two organizations were antagonistic to each other. During a New Orleans street car strike not long ago, a whole company of militia, called out to protect non-union men, resigned in a body. Mr. John Mulholland, president of the International Association of Allied Metal Mechanics, has stated that he does not want the members to join the militia. The Local Trades Assembly of Syracuse, N. Y., has passed a resolution by unanimous vote requiring union men who are members of the National Guard to resign under pain of expulsion from the unions. The Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers' Association has incorporated in its constitution an amendment excluding from membership in its organization "any person a member of the regular army or of the State militia or naval reserve." The Illinois State Federation of Labor, at a recent convention, passed without a dissenting vote a resolution declaring that membership in military organizations is a violation of labor union obligations, and requesting all union men to withdraw from the militia. The president of the Federation, Mr. Albert Young, declared that the militia was a menace not only to unions, but to all workers throughout the country.

These instances may be multiplied a thousand-fold. The union workmen are becoming conscious of their class and of the struggle their class is waging with the capitalist class. To be a member of the militia is to be a traitor to the union, for the militia is a weapon wielded by the employers to crush the workers in the struggle between the warring groups.

Another interesting and even more pregnant phase of the class struggle is the political aspect of it as displayed by the Socialists. Five men standing together may perform prodigies; five hundred men, marching as marched the historic Five Hundred of Marseilles, may sack a palace and destroy a king; while three hundred thousand men, passionately preaching the propaganda of a class struggle, waging a class struggle along political lines, and backed by the moral and intellectual support of ten million more men of like convictions throughout the world, may come pretty close to realizing a class struggle in these United States of ours.

In 1900 these men cast 150,000 votes; two years later, in 1902, they cast 300,000 votes; and in 1904, they promise to cast 500,000 votes. They have behind them a most imposing philosophic and scientific literature; they own illustrated magazines and reviews, high in quality, dignity and restraint; they possess countless daily and weekly papers which circulate throughout the land and single papers of which have subscribers by the hundreds of thousands; and they literally swamp the working classes in a vast sea of tracts and pamphlets. No political party in the United States, no church organization or mission effort, has as indefatigable workers as has the Socialist Party. They multiply themselves, know of no effort or sacrifice too great to make for the Cause; and "Cause," with them, is spelled out in capitals. They work for it with a religious zeal, and would die for it with a willingness similar to that of the Christian martyrs.

These men are preaching an uncompromising and deadly class struggle. In fact, they are organized upon a basis of a class struggle. Hear them:

"The history of society is a history of class struggles. Patrician struggled with plebeian in early Rome; the king and the burghers with the nobles in the Middle Ages; later on, the king and the nobles with the bourgeoisie; and to-day the struggle is on between the triumphant bourgeoisie and the rising proletariat. By proletariat is meant the class of people without capital, which sells its labor for a living.

“That the proletariat shall conquer (mark the note of fatalism), is as certain as the rising sun. Just as the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century wanted democracy applied to politics, so the proletariat of the twentieth century wants democracy applied to industry. As the bourgeoisie complained against Government being run by and for the nobles, so the proletariat complains against the Government and industry being run by and for the bourgeoisie; and so, following in the footsteps of its predecessor, the proletariat will possess itself of the Government, apply democracy to industry, abolish wages, and run the business of the country in its own interest.

“Their aim, they say, is to organize the working class, and those in sympathy with it, into a political party, with the object of conquering the powers of government and using them for the purpose of transforming the present system of private ownership of the means of production and distribution into collective ownership by the entire people.”

Briefly stated, this is the battle-plan of these 300,000 men who call themselves “Socialists.” And in the face of the existence of such an aggressive group of men a class struggle cannot very well be denied by the optimistic Americans who say: “A class struggle is monstrous. Sir, there is no class struggle.” The class struggle is here, and the optimistic American had better gird himself for the fray and put a stop to it rather than sit idly declaiming that what ought not to be is not and never will be.

But the Socialists, fanatics and dreamers tho they may well be, betray a foresight and insight and a genius for organization which put to shame the class with which they are openly at war. Failing rapid success, in waging a sheer political propaganda, and finding that they were alienating the most intelligent and most easily organized portion of the voters, the Socialists lessened from the experience and turned their energies upon the trade union movement. To win the trade unions was well-nigh to win the war, and recent events show that they have done far more winning in this direction than have the capitalists.

Instead of antagonizing the unions, which had been their previous policy, the Socialists proceeded to conciliate the unions. “Let every good Socialist join the union of his trade,” the edict went forth. “Bore from within and capture the trade union movement.” And this policy, only several years old, has reaped fruits far beyond their fondest expectations. To-day the great labor unions are honeycombed with Socialists, “boring from within,” as they picturesquely term their undermining labor. At work and at play, at business meeting and council, their insidious propaganda goes on. At the shoulder of the trade unionist is the Socialist, sympathizing with him, aiding him with head and hand, suggesting—perpetually suggesting—the necessity for political action. As the *Journal*, of Lansing Mich., a Republican paper, has remarked:

“The Socialists in the labor unions are tireless workers. They are sincere, energetic and self-sacrificing. . . . They stick to the union and work all the while, thus making a showing, which, reckoned by ordinary standards, is out of all proportion to their numbers. . . . Their cause is growing among union laborers, and their long fight intended to turn the Federation into a political organization is likely to win.”

By their tireless efforts the Socialists have already come within an ace of capturing the great American Federation of Labor, with its million and a quarter of members and the population of six millions which they represent. In 1900 the Socialist delegates at the National Convention attempted to carry a straight-out Socialist resolution pledging the Federation to political action. But they were defeated by a substitute resolution on a vote of 4,169 to 685. The following year they were sidetracked. But last year, at the New Orleans Convention, their show of strength surprised even themselves. Instead of controlling one-sixth of the vote, they found that they controlled nearly one-half. They lost, but they lost by a vote of 4,774 to 4,344—a

record for “boring from within” the significance of which has not been noticed by the class upon whom they have declared battle without quarter.

Night and day, tireless and unrelenting as a mortgage, they labor at their self-imposed task of undermining society. Mr. M. G. Cunniff, who lately made an intimate study of trade unionism, says: “All through the unions Socialism filters. Almost every other man is a Socialist, preaching that unionism is but a makeshift.” “Malthus be damned,” they told him, “for the good time was coming when every man should be able to rear his family in comfort.” In one union, with two thousand members, Mr. Cunniff found every man a Socialist, and from his experiences Mr. Cunniff was forced to confess “I lived in a world that showed our industrial life a-tremble from beneath with a never-ceasing ferment.”

The Socialists have already captured the Western Federation of Minders, the Western Hotel and Restaurant Employees’ Union and the Patternmakers’ National Association. The Western Federation of Miners, at its last convention, declared:

“The strike has failed to secure to the working classes their liberty, we therefore call upon the workers to strike as one man for their liberties at the ballot-box. . . . We put ourselves on record as committed to the program of independent political action. . . . We indorse the platform of the Socialist Party, and accept it as the declaration of principles of our organization. We call upon our members as individuals to commence immediately the organization of the Socialist movement in their respective towns and States, and to co-operate in every way for the furtherance of the principles of Socialism and of the Socialist Party. In States where the Socialist Party has not perfected its organization, we advise that every assistance be given by our members to that end. . . . We therefore call for organizers, capable and well versed in the whole program of the labor movement, to be sent into each State to preach the necessity of organization on the political as well as the economic field.”

The capitalist class has a glimmering consciousness of the class struggle which is shaping itself in the midst of society; but the capitalists, as a class, seem to lack the ability for organizing, for coming together, such as is possessed by the working class. No American capitalist ever aids an English capitalist in the common fight, while workmen have formed international unions, the Socialists a world-wide international organization, and on all sides space and race are bridged in the effort to achieve solidarity. Resolutions of sympathy, and, fully as important, donations of money, pass back and forth across the sea to wherever labor is fighting its pitched battles.

For diverse reasons the capitalist class lacks this cohesion or solidarity, chief among which is the optimism bred of past success. And, again, the capitalist class is divided; it has within itself a class struggle of no mean proportions, which tends to irritate and harass it and to confuse the situation. The small capitalist and the large capitalist are grappled with each other, struggling over what Achille Loria calls the “bi-partition of the revenues.” Such a struggle, though not precisely analogous, was waged between the landlords and manufacturers of England, when the one brought about passage of the Factory Acts and the other the repeal of the Corn Laws.

Here and there, however, certain members of the capitalist class see clearly the cleavage in society along which the struggle is beginning to show itself, while the press and magazines are beginning to raise an occasional and troubled voice. Two leagues of class conscious capitalists have been formed for the purpose of carrying on their side of the struggle. Like the Socialists, they do not mince matters, but state boldly and plainly that they are fighting to subjugate the opposing class. It is the barons against the commons. One of these leagues, the National Association of Manufacturers, is stopping short of nothing in what it conceives to be a life and

death struggle. Mr. D. M. Parry, who is the president of the League, as well as president of the National Metal Trades Association, is leaving no stone unturned in what he feels to be a desperate effort to organize his class. He has issued the call to arms in terms everything but ambiguous:

“There is still time in the United States to head off the Socialistic program, which, unrestrained, is sure to wreck our country.”

As he says, the work is for:

“. . . federating employers in order that we may meet with a united front all issues that affect us. We must come to this sooner or later. . . . The work immediately before the National Association of Manufacturers is, first, *keep the vicious Eight-Hour bill off the books*; second, to *destroy the Anti-Injunction bill*, which wrests your business from you and places it in the hands of your employees; third, to secure the *passage of the Department of Commerce and Industry bill*—the latter would go through with a rush were it not for the hectoring opposition of organized labor.”

By this department, he further says,

“. . . business interests would have direct and sympathetic representation at Washington.”

In a later letter, issued broadcast to the capitalists outside of the League, President Parry points out the success which is already beginning to attend the efforts of the League at Washington.

“We have contributed more than any other influence to the quick passage of the new Department of Commerce bill. It is said that the activities of this office are numerous and satisfactory; but of that I must not say too much—or anything. . . . At Washington the Association is not represented too much, either directly or indirectly. Sometimes it is known in a most powerful way that it is represented vigorously and unitedly. Sometimes it is not known that it is represented at all.”

The second class conscious capitalist organization is called the National Economic League. It likewise manifests the frankness of men who do not dilly dally with terms, but who say what they mean, and who mean to settle down to a long, hard fight. Their letter of invitation to prospective members opens boldly:

“We beg to inform you that the National Economic League will render it services in an impartial educational movement *to oppose Socialism and class hatred.*”

Among its class conscious members, men who recognize that the opening guns of the class struggle have been fired, may be instanced the following names: Hon. Lyman J. Gage, ex-Secretary United States Treasury; Hon. Thomas Jefferson Coolidge, ex-Minister to France; Rev. Henry C. Potter, Bishop of New York Diocese; Hon. John D. Long, Secretary of United States Navy; Hon. Levi P. Morton, ex-Vice-President of the United States; Henry Clews; John F. Dryden, President of the Prudential Life Insurance Company; John A. McCall, President of the New York Life Insurance Company; J. L. Greatsinger, President of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company; the shipbuilding firm of Wm. Cramp & Sons; the Southern Railway System, and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fé Railway Company.

Instances of the troubled editorial voice have not been rare during the last twelve months. There were many cries from the press during the last days of the anthracite coal strike that the mine owners, by their stubbornness, were sowing the regrettable seeds of Socialism. The *World's Work* for December, 1902, said:

“The next significant fact is the recommendation by the Illinois Federation of Labor that all members of labor unions who are also members of the State militia shall resign from the

militia. This proposition has been favorably regarded by some other labor organizations. It has done more than any other single recent declaration or action to cause a public distrust of such unions as favor it. *It hints of a class separation that, in turn, hints of anarchy.*”

The *Outlook*, February 14th, 1903, in reference to the rioting at Waterbury, remarks:

“That all this disorder should have occurred in a city of the character and intelligence of Waterbury indicates that the industrial war spirit is by no means confined to the immigrant or ignorant working classes.”

That President Roosevelt has smelt the smoke from the firing-line of the class struggle is evidenced by his words:

“Above all, we need to remember that any kind of *class animosity in the political world is*, if possible, even more destructive to national welfare than sectional, race or religious animosity.”

The chief thing to be noted here is President’s Roosevelt’s tacit recognition of class animosity in the industrial world, and his fear, which language cannot portray stronger, that this class animosity may spread to the political world. Yet this is the very policy which the Socialists have announced in their declaration of war against present-day society—to capture the political machinery of society and by that machinery destroy present-day society.

THE INDEPENDENT, in an editorial published February 12th, 1903, recognized without qualification the class struggle:

“It is impossible fairly to pass upon the methods of labor unions, or to devise plans for remedying their abuses, until it is recognized, to begin with, that unions are based upon class antagonism, and that their policies are dictated by the necessities of social warfare. A strike is a rebellion against the owners of property. The rights of property are protected by government. And a strike, under certain provocation, may extend as far as the general strike in Belgium a few years since, when practically the entire wage-earning population stopped work in order to force political concessions from the property-owning classes. This is an extreme case, but it brings out vividly the real nature of labor organization as a species of warfare whose object is the coercion of one class by another class.”

It has been shown, theoretically and actually, that there is a class struggle in the United States. The quarrel over the division of the joint product is irreconcilable. The working class is no longer losing its strongest and most capable members. These men, denied room for their ambition in the capitalist ranks, remain to be the leaders of the workers, to spur them to discontent, to make them conscious of their class, to lead them to revolt.

This revolt, appearing spontaneously all over the industrial field in the form of demands for an increased share of the joint product, is being carefully and shrewdly shaped for a political assault upon society. The leaders, with the carelessness of fatalists, do not hesitate for an instant to publish their intentions to the world. They intend to direct the labor revolt to the capture of the political machinery of society. With the political machinery once in their hands, which will also give them the control of the police, the army, the navy and the courts, they will confiscate, with or without remuneration, all the possessions of the capitalist class which are used in the production and distribution of the necessities and luxuries of life. By this they mean to apply the law of eminent domain to the land, and to extend the law of eminent domain till it embraces the mines, the factories, the railroads and the ocean carriers. In short, they intend to destroy present-day society, which they contend is run in the interest of another class, and from the materials to construct a new society which will be run in their interest.

On the other hand, the capitalist class is beginning to grow conscious of itself and of the struggle which is being waged. It is already forming offensive and defensive leagues, while some of the most prominent figures in the nation are preparing to lead it in the attack upon Socialism.

The question to be solved is not one of Malthusianism, "projected efficiency," or ethics. It is a question of might. Whichever class is to win, will win by virtue of superior strength; for the workers are beginning to say, as they said to Mr. Cunniff, "Malthus be damned." In their own minds they find no sanction for continuing the individual struggle for the survival of the fittest. As Mr. Gompers has said, they want more, and more, and more. The ethical import of Mr. Kidd's plan of the present generation putting up with less in order that race efficiency may be projected into a remote future has no bearing upon their actions. They refuse to be the "glad perishers" so glowingly described by Nietzsche.

It remains to be seen how promptly the capitalist class will respond to the call to arms. Upon its promptness rests its existence, for if it sit idly by, soothfully proclaiming that what ought not to be cannot be, it will find the roof-beams crashing about its head. No three thousand of its members, much less three hundred thousand, are organized to crush the revolt which is spreading with such rapidity. The capitalist class is in the numerical minority, and bids fair to be outvoted if it does not put a stop to the vast propaganda being waged by its enemy. Nor in this direction has it as yet conceived any adequate plan, such as its assailants have conceived and are putting into execution in their attempt to capture the trade union movement with its millions of votes. It is no longer a question of whether or not there is a class struggle. The question now is, what will be the outcome of the class struggle?