

CAPITALISM AND THE COUNTER REVOLUTION. By J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

III.

In concluding my last article I argued that our task as Socialists was not to endeavour to end the War, but to prepare for Revolution. Now, as the Revolution will not come as the result of our agitation, or even of our organisation, but because of certain circumstances that make it impossible for the present political and economic system to satisfy the requirements of society, it is of the utmost importance that we should thoroughly understand the conditions within our own country. If the conditions are ripe for revolution, then they will very soon precipitate matters, however much the executive and sub-committees of the propertied classes may endeavour to postpone the historic necessity. If they are not ripe; then we may as well dispose ourselves to study still more carefully the laws that govern their maturity, and the correct methods of gathering in the crop when it actually comes to fruition. It will be more tedious than to amuse ourselves with projects of action; but it will be incalculably more profitable. Whatever may be the prospects of Revolution, the anticipation of which is as pleasant to us as it is detestable to our opponents, we can only estimate these by examining into the political and economic development of Britain and those other countries with which its fortunes are intimately connected.

It is wearisome in the extreme to hear people for ever lamenting the dull, unresponsive character of the British working class; and it must be appalling to have such people's hopeless outlook upon the future, whether ultimate or immediate. At meetings up and down the country the enthusiast who denounces the strikes for their sordid purpose and for the petty nature of the grievances that provoke them, is a phenomenon productive of violent aggravation of this writer's human instincts. (Sometimes, when an idealist, whose fervour for pacifism has been vastly stimulated by the operation of the Military Service Acts, feels called upon to testify to the selfishness of the craftsman stimulated to strike by reason of dilution, a Quaker upbringing does not prevent me seeing, it not red, at any rate pink.

The Socialist movement in this country would not suffer by being very frank with itself about its paternity. It is not the result of a great idealist "urge," to use an Americanism. It has been the product of material development and very closely parallels in its growth the movement in the United States. Of course, these similarities cannot be pressed too far, because of the differences in political and economic evolution across the ocean; but they are near enough to be instructive.

This country has the good, or ill, fortune to have been the classic land of Capitalism, the home of the classic form of Capitalism. Here

industrial and commercial development took place, on a great scale, at an earlier time than elsewhere, because of our insular immunity from the ravages and unsettlement of war, as well as from our geographical position. There sprung up a very considerable middle class, small masters—according to present standards—shopkeepers, merchants. Britain became pre-eminently the land of commodity production, of competitive manufacture and trading. Landed conditions rooted in feudalism promoted this, and the small proprietor, like the would-be gentleman he was, went into the respectable business of trade, i.e., handling the products of someone else's toil.

The political settlement of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1689 was followed by a gigantic appropriation of common lands and the persistent encouragement by the State of capitalist agriculture. This caused the yeoman to turn to trade and manufacture and the cottar and small cultivator to flock to industry as a "free" worker. But these "free" workers, as well as those whose labour they diluted, acquired, or retained, a certain craftsmanship, whilst the machinery and requisites of their toil called into being new trades and fresh aptitudes. These industrial workers were in fairly close relations of intercourse with their employers and were deeply touched with Methodism and Baptism in England and Wales. They became of the same mind as their employers, individualistic and always striving to elevate themselves to a higher class. The craftsman and the working tradesman of classic capitalist production belonged spiritually to the middle-class. Very slowly and tentatively did they, or their employers, realise the trend that events were taking.

The enormous expansion of British commerce after 1848, into the causes of which we cannot here enter, absorbed not only the displaced hand-workers into industry at home or sent them forth as colonists, but brought plenty of work and good wages to the tens of thousands of Irish who were drawn to this country in the first half of the nineteenth century. This, and Free Trade in corn, shattered Chartism—the political expression of the chagrin of the displaced and diluted textile handworkers. In its place arose trades unionism of the quiet, sluggish type, born, not of the English temperament, but of contemporary prosperity and the mitigation of the class struggle.

British industrialism was maturing, German industrialism was being born, and with it German Socialism was enjoying a vigorous and stormy youth. The cause of this was the discontent of the German craftsmen and peasant occupiers with the loss of independence which absorption in factory work entailed. They were too late to share the industrial strivings of their British comrades, who had passed on to

the quietude that afterwards overcame the German workers and made them respectable and decent fellows, according to capitalist ideas. Hence, the British and the German workers failed to understand each other.

When German capitalism got into its stride and American capitalism began to show the mettle of its pasture, British industry experienced the humiliating fact of competition. Britain, the workshop of the world, discovered that others had dared to challenge her long-continued monopoly. The "eighties" were sad years of bad times, the modification of private enterprise, and keen foreign competition. Numbers of workers and middle-class men and women became aware of a change in the political and economic status and attitude of sections of the capitalist class. Some deserted Liberalism for Liberal Unionism. Others went over from Radicalism to political Socialism. They became either Fabians or S.D.F'ers. At the same time in America, the robbery of the public domain by the big land thieves caused the middle-class to listen eagerly to Henry George, whose gospel received a welcome from the Radicals of this country, deserted by their leaders, who had now become not only big capitalists but land-owners.

This was the first flowering of Socialism in Britain. Then the capitalist class called to their service their executive committee, and with Chamberlain, Rhodes, and Milner, set out to extend and improve the imperial market for home products. By naval programmes and other means, they helped the newly developing associations and syndicates to regain lost ground and to expand. After two minor defeats, more apparent than real, the "trust" magnates of America got thoroughly ensconced in the saddle, and set about to organise the small men off the United States.

From 1903 to 1909, Socialism had another vigorous period of growth in Britain and the United States. The same conditions of industrial concentration, the same tendency to imperialism, drove the lower middle class and sections of the working class to the Socialist ranks. Then, from 1910 to the outbreak of war, Lloyd George, and the far more useful, because more cultured and apparently more disinterested, Woodrow Wilson, delayed and divided—as they were put up to do—the Socialist forces.

When the War came, the Radical middle class looked sorrowfully after their leaders and, with halting steps, came to Socialism via the U.D.C. and the I.L.P. In America similar developments have had similar consequences. But, in both countries, the mass of the workers has remained content with its national leaders.

(To be continued.)