

THE VIEWS OF A WORKING MAN

DEAR EDITOR,

It is obvious that the Labour Party's nationalisation policy does not matter a cuss to the working man. To be employed by the State and to be bossed by the State makes no great difference. When all industries are nationalised then the working man will have to be careful and not dirty his bib, for he will not be able to go to another boss. But does the State really represent the organised force of the whole community? Of course not! It is the most astute, cunning or most unscrupulous party in the community that runs the State and that political party in power in its turn can be just the instrument of a few clever intellectuals dominated by passion and lust for power. Where does the political party show any care or concern for the working man? The working man is a member or head of a family; nobody ever thinks of aiding him to achieve security by consolidating him in a home of his own without rent or render to anyone on earth.

Liberal, radical and socialist are taxing out of existence the ancient landlord system on the land, but the tenant farmer and the despised land labourer are no better off and the dispossessed lumper proletariat in nationalised industries are frustrated, pessimistic, rebellious and distrustful of their own leaders. Thus they engage in what are called unofficial strikes. Why is this? Communists are blamed; but communists are just another brand of socialists. They have different methods or tactics for achieving their common ideal of a socialist state, in other words they want power, complete omnipotent power over all people, and they pursue their purpose relentlessly. None of them believes in the right of the working man or of any man to be independent, reliant on self or free. If I am a member of a trades union I cannot ventilate my views in the journal of my trades union, if my views conflict with the trades union's policy. If a man of independent views expresses himself at a trades union gathering officialdom finds a way of suppressing him. At Trades Union Congresses ordinary delegates cannot get a chance to speak. Elaborate 'Standing Orders' prevent discussions.

The Labour Party, mainly supported by the financial levies made on working men, is largely under the control of people of middle class origin. They are the people who plot and plan for socialism or nationalisation of industries. At Labour Party Conferences it is these people who explain *their* policy as being the policy of the Labour Party. The Communist Party likewise announces that *their*

party's policy is the policy of the workers; but the truth of the matter is that the worker's voice is unheard and his views unsought.

Many years ago Lenin, a Russian Communist, sneered at the workers as being unable to develop anything but trades union consciousness; he had no use for trades unions except to exploit them for his political purposes. But trades unions (in spite of bad leadership, apathy and political careerists) did immense good for the workers and are capable of solving working men's problems, but Lenin was not concerned with bettering the lot of working men; he, like the socialist, did not believe in the ability of the working man to solve his own problems.

Lenin wrote 'The history of all countries shows that by its own exclusive efforts the working class is only able to achieve trades union consciousness. It may itself realise the necessity for continuing in unions to fight the employers and to strive to compel governments to pass necessary social legislation and the like, but the theory of Socialism grew out of the philosophical, historical and economic theories elaborated by the learned representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. The very founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels themselves, belonged to the bourgeoisie intelligentsia [Lenin also]. Similarly in Russia the theoretical doctrine of social democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the Labour Movement, it arose as a national and legitimate outcome of the development of ideas among the socialist intelligentsia.'

As a workman who after a long and hard day's work pens these lines, I believe it is of urgent necessity for working men and indeed every citizen to know and understand something about social and economic organisation so that people will get to understand the slogans and catch-cries designed to hoodwink ordinary people.

When the protagonists of family allowances succeeded in arousing public interest in this excellent means of helping the struggling father of a family, it is significant that the first opponents of family allowances in Britain and France were socialists. Why? Socialism is concerned with the 'theories of the representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals'. Trades union consciousness of the working man is concerned with wages and 'compelling governments to pass necessary labour legislation, and the like'. Precisely!—and what more does a working man want beyond 'necessary labour' and social legislation?

We already see what is happening as a result of the putting into practice of the theories 'elaborated by the socialist intelligentsia'. In Soviet Russia vast schemes of work have been carried through

at the expense of the people and the sweat of working men. Take for example the huge electrical undertaking at Dneiperstroi where thousands of working men sweated and toiled, living in barracks where they rented an angle of a room perhaps to house themselves and their families—and then Germans came and left not a stone upon a stone. Of what benefit was all this toil of working men when they were only the slaves of a ruthless political party who were only concerned with their lust for power for themselves at the expense of misery, blood and tears of the common people? Working men with the aid of the Church down the ages have been educated to read and to think clearly, they have risen out of slavery and serfdom, they have been told that as children of God they have rights that are inalienable. Honest working men have come together, have built up their trades unions in the spirit of the trades union motto 'defence not defiance' and they have won a certain amount of recognition of their inalienable God-given rights. What has been won must not be thrown away at the behest of professional revolutionary theoreticians but working men must consolidate their trades unions, co-operative societies and other industrial organisations. They must continue to educate themselves, to learn to take responsibility in the running of the industries they live by. That working men should be in control of their own industries is a legitimate aspiration and is the antithesis of communism or socialism.

With the spread of education and the fostering of a sense of dignity amongst workmen a keener interest will be taken by them in the responsibilities of industrial ownership and management. The first essential for harmony in social relations is that workmen and employers must come together, to work together for the common good, to pave the way for labour representation on management boards. The co-operative ownership and democratic control by working men—or by working men acting in conjunction with individual employers or firms—are things to be aimed at; hitherto the working people have supported the various political parties, *all* of which have contributed something to social reform and won for the working man great benefits and rights. The immediate problem confronting working men is to take stock of the situation and not allow themselves to be swayed by politicians into supporting anything other than '*necessary labour legislation and the like*' and to integrate their organisations with the other organisations of the other classes.

It must not be thought by working men that others are necessarily hostile; and workmen's organisations along with employers

and the organisations of the various professional groups should combine for the common good. The present system of elections for municipal and other local bodies should be scrapped and the professional organisations and vocational bodies should elect their representatives to administer local bodies and a check should be made on the State's filching of the rights of the people to carry out their own business themselves.

As a country worker I should like to see the farmers and their labourers organised in their unions and to see Parish Councils composed of people elected by the farmers and the working men's unions together with the representatives of the professional and other unions. The present system of elections is entirely wrong and the people are apathetic about their local affairs because the right people cannot be elected. The old system is undemocratic. We want the best of every group on our local councils, that is how Christian democracy should work—all sections working for the community. Municipal government began in the thrift guild and today it ought to be in the hands of the various trades and professional organisations. Trades unions ought to have representatives on all local bodies, County Councils, District Councils, Port Authorities and Dock and Harbour Boards, together with representatives of all other sections of the community. Working men have little influence on these bodies which largely control the destinies of their lives. There is grave hardship suffered by working men today; it is true wages are very much increased but £1 today is worth only seven shillings of its internal purchasing power in 1914. The young workman setting up house finds it hard to get a home and Council houses building today, in country parts at least, are jerry built with the flimsiest roofing. When one thinks of the solid built houses in old villages and sees the costly but ugly shelters being put up one wonders if we are really progressing.

The tenant farmers and bona fide land workers ought to have at least one acre of land and house each, inalienably their own on a fee simple basis. To achieve this the farmers and the agricultural workers should meet the great landlords to hammer out a scheme for easy purchase or for State loans. The State ought not to be permitted to confiscate lands by heavy taxation and so dispossess everyone, landlord, farmer and labourer alike.

The concentration of all wealth in land and industry in the State is as inimical to the well-being of the working man as its concentration in the hands of a few private capitalists. In Russia we see the ordinary working man is no better off than in Tsarist days, but there is a new upper class there, some of whom may be sprung

from the working class, but nevertheless now belong to a new ruling class who hold their positions by supporting the government with servility. The new class pander to a State authority controlled by ruthless despots and are amassing fortunes for themselves whilst the rank and file workers work for a pittance. So we working men insist that we shall have some share of the wealth we help to produce by having ownership and control of some tangible concrete property such as the houses we live in and the fields and factories where we work.

The worker has won the political right to fight for necessary social legislation, now is the time to take stock of the position. To use power to bring the reality of political freedom into effect by acquiring property, to develop a sense of responsibility and to determine that it shall not be out of the plutocratic capitalist pan and into the socialist fire.

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PRIVATE PROPERTY A MORAL RIGHT

FATHER MACLAREN in his Aquinas Paper, *Private Property and the Natural Law*¹, builds his thesis around the question of the interpretation of such statements from the papal encyclicals on the social question as: 'The right to own private property has been given to man by Nature, or rather by the Creator himself'. What do such statements mean? he asks. 'Do they mean that the right to private property belongs to the nature of man in the same way, let us say, as the right to life itself? Do they mean that private property is the only legitimate way in which a man can own material possessions? In other words, is private property an absolute right completely excluding any other way of possessing material things?' I should agree with Father MacLaren in answering the first two questions in the negative but I should hesitate about the third, because it seems to contain a certain confusion of thought that flaws the whole argument in his paper and which makes a yes or no answer impossible. In other words, the question implies that unless a right is 'exclusive' it is not 'absolute'.

Primary Natural rights, of course, are both absolute and exclusive. They flow from the very nature of man. Each is essential if man is to exist as man. Each covers its own field entirely. Thus, for example, the right to life itself. Secondary Natural rights are drawn from primary natural rights as conclusion from premiss.

¹ *Private Property and the Natural Law* by Drostan MacLaren, O.P. Aquinas Paper No. 8 (Blackfriars; 1s. 6d.).