

Plutocracy Triumphant

Ross Winn

1902

The political reformers can find little that is really comforting in the result of the November elections. The Republican party representing the financial and commercial interests of the capitalist class is everywhere triumphant, while the forces of reform are once again squarely turned down by the American voters. The Socialists are making a mighty fuss over the increase of their vote, but this empty fact seems to me to be what the great Prentiss termed "a damned barren ideality." The Chicago Public, which is the most intelligent political journal in the United States, sees nothing satisfactory in the outcome, except the lessons convincingly conveyed by it, lessons that will scarcely be heeded by the political managers. Inasmuch as The Firebrand predicted the result correctly two weeks before the election, giving all the reasons therefor, it is unnecessary for me to review the causes of this last victory of plutocracy over the people. For it was most certainly a plutocratic victory, more sweeping and pronounced than the re-election of McKinley two years ago.

If the Socialists got a few crumbs of comfort from the increase of their vote, the Anarchists can find a little consolation in the large increase of non-voters, whose absence from the polls indicated their indifference to or disgust for political action. However, the careful student of political affairs will find, after a thoro canvass of the situation, that the entire election was really devoid of significance, except that it illustrates very clearly the mental status of the masses. The majority of the voters of this and all other countries, are simply incapable of intelligent political action. It is, in all countries, the minority who force action along the lines of improvement and advance.

As a revolutionist, I can see but one lesson in the result of the November elections. That is the utter futility of the ballot as a weapon of reform. Majorities are not progressive. How, then, can we expect progress to result of majority action? Show me one advance of human progress achieved by the action of a majority, and I will concede the whole case to my political friends. Open history at every epoch of social advance, and you will find that whatsoever has been accomplished has been the work of a revolutionary minority.

The mass mind has ever been a stagnant force of conservative inaction, against which the waves of social progress have beat; and, had humanity waited for the initiative of the "dumb driven herd," the tide of civilization would have never crossed the low-level of barbarism.

Every forward step of human advance has been a tidal-wave of revolution.

Every revolution has been the work of a minority.

These are the two most firmly established facts of history.

Wherever reformers have gone into politics as a political party, they have become stagnantly conservative, and their efforts barren of result. Political action has extinguished the revolutionary spirit and character of Socialism in Europe and America. In return for this loss, Socialism is no nearer the goal of official power to-day than it was fifteen years ago.

The Greenback party, Union Labor party, Populist party, each attempted to combat the power of capitalism with the ballot. They all failed. No revolutionary force ever yet moved a political majority to action. The mass-mind never initiated any reform. It is the thinking few who achieve the changes that make progress and civilization possible.

By revolutionary action I do not mean the use of violence. The question of physical force is an incident of revolutions, invariably raised by those opposed to change. I believe that force to the degree of violence is never expedient except as opposed to invasive violence. It is the upholders of the established authority who resort to violence as a means of maintaining their supremacy. I am a lover of peace. But I do not believe in running in order to maintain it.

I believe that the forces of radical reform can achieve all that they have in view by an international general strike. The workers of the world could be its masters, and could achieve both their political and economic emancipation from capitalism by a peaceful refusal to be exploited. It is the wage-workers who are the most vitally interested in the destruction of the capitalist system. The world-wide struggle in progress to-day, disguise it as we may, is a CLASS STRUGGLE. It is a conflict between the workers and the exploiters, between the slaves and the masters. And the victory of the workers must be their own achievement. The battle is their's. They, who support by their toil the burden of the world, have but to formulate their demands and enforce them by a general refusal to work longer for their masters, and the battle is won.

This cannot be accomplished by party action. The hope of the reform movement is in the action of an intelligent revolutionary minority, and the means most effective is the general strike.

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