

AFTER READING "A THEORY  
OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT"

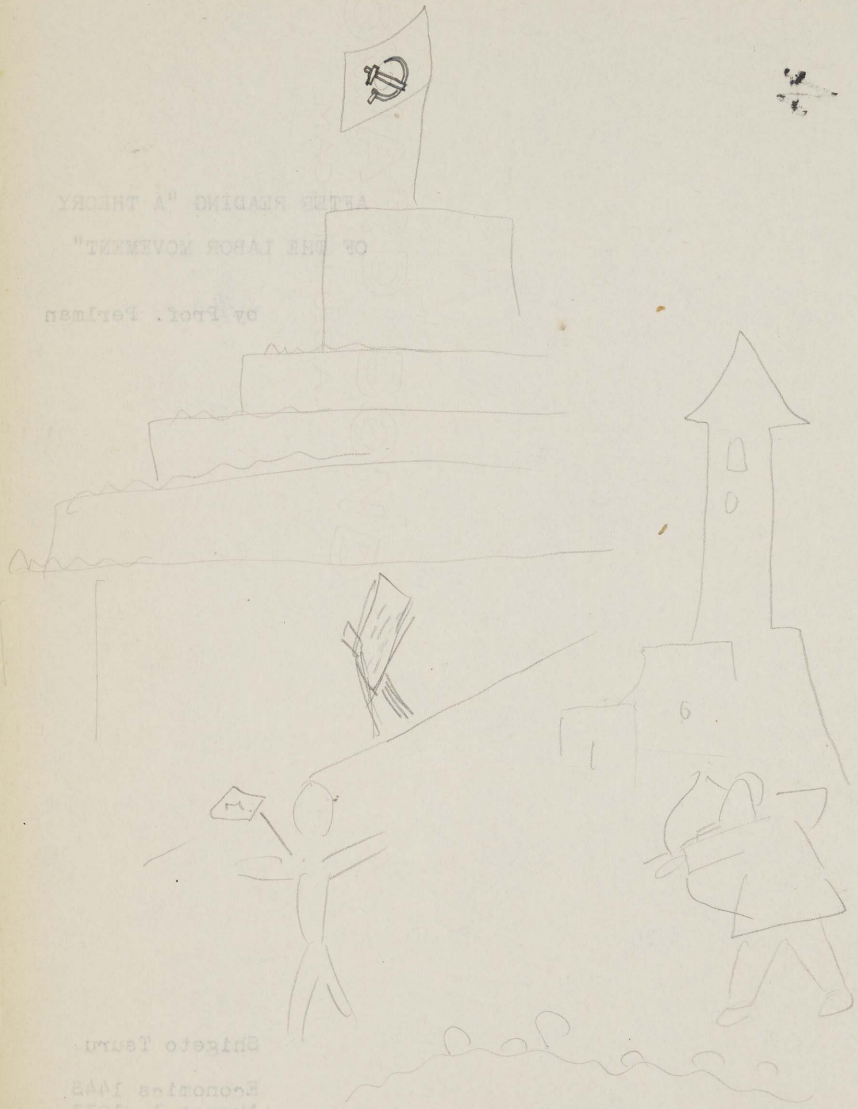
by Prof. Perlman

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"A THEORY OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT"

I. With the meager knowledge of facts in the field of the labor movement, I am fully aware of the danger of making general considerations as to the theoretical implications. Needless to say that my intention is far from criticizing this book of repute, but only to jot down the marks of my appreciation as I strike them on the way.

II. So far as facts are concerned, nobody should have anything to quarrel <sup>about</sup> upon. The controversy arises when <sup>the</sup> authenticity of the alleged fact itself becomes doubtful or when one attempts to arrange them in a certain orderly way. But when order is superimposed upon nature by human intellect, <sup>any</sup> injustice done to nature is always revealed through the discovery of contradictory facts. The very fact that a certain theory proves to be inadequate and that there is a grade of adequacy is one of the reasons why we are entitled to assume the order in nature. This order is what we call "objective causal relationships."

Social scientists try to reproduce as approximately as he can the objective causal relationships in society. The attempt is extremely bold. Some are satisfied with merely

stating the facts as they are, but some others go into organizing them with the least contradiction with facts as possible. <sup>as little</sup> But sometimes one is tempted to make a hasty generalization, having found a certain outstanding similarity between two phenomena. The more scientific one is, the more careful is he in avoiding such a superimposition of subjective wish. The fact that one keeps silent, suspending his judgment, is not necessarily the sign of scientific <sup>a</sup> attitude. <sup>a</sup>

Here my first query arises: what is "the theorizing in petty manner"? Is it to avoid the hasty generalization and the subjective superimposition or to suspend the judgment <sup>about</sup> as to the phenomenon of wider scope? Is it petty because it does not build a theoretical skyscraper or is <sup>(it)</sup> so because it does the least harm to the objective reality?

With the given data of ascertained facts, the alternative <sup>one</sup> is two: ~~xi~~ either to suspend the judgment or to theorize. For those who ~~choose~~ choose to theorize, the question is how to approximate best the objective causal relationships. Whether one theory looks more petty than the other is entirely immaterial.

Marxism is a Weltanschauung. It has its logic, its ~~epistemology~~ epistemology, and it has its economics, sociology, and etc. Opponents of Marx, and even some of his disciples, have carried many of his statements to the extreme, or often isolated his phrases out of their contexts. It is also true that the necessity of propaganda strategy simplified many of his principles into aphorismic generalizations. If we take these things into consideration, it becomes highly doubtful if any person,



with the intention to <sup>which Marx had</sup> cover such a wide scope of data, as Marx had could ever formulate a methodology at once truer yet less grand than dialectic materialism.

Pettiness or grandness of theorizing is entirely immaterial to the truth of the theory. If one chooses to employ such an abstract distinction, nobody will object. The objection will be raised the minute when he infers something other than the size, such as truth quality, from the size of the theory itself.

Several passages from this Prof. Perlman's book had made me suspect if he were not carrying some of the Marxian principles beyond, or opposite to, what Marx originally intended. If he interpreted Marx in such a way, it is quite natural for him to criticize the rigidity of Marxian generalizations which would crumble by an attack of single contradictory fact. The following are the examples:

"It is an irony of fate that the same Revolution which purports to enact into life the Marxian social program should belie the truth of Marx's materialistic interpretations of history, and demonstrate that history is shaped by both economic and non-economic forces."<sup>(1)</sup>

Did Marx ever say that history is shaped only by economic forces? Economic forces <sup>themselves</sup> manifest and work through the agency of human institutions and relations. How, then, could noneconomic factors be irrelevant to the shaping of history?

"Despite the copiousness of the statistical and sociolo-

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(1) S. Perlman: A Theory of The Labor Movement, Macmillan, 1928. p.15

gical evidence adduced by Marxism for the view that the workman is bound, in the very nature of capitalism, to espouse the cause of revolution,---and despite Marxism's intense concern with concrete labor movement, from Chartism to date,---it remains true that, at bottom the Marxian theory of the labor movement rests upon a species of faith,---namely the faith that history has appointed the labor movement to be the force which eventually will bring society to the third and final step in the Hegelian dialectical scheme of evolution."<sup>(2)</sup>

The transformation of "Die Klasse an sich" to "Die Klasse fuer sich" involves the conscious effort of the vanguards of the class, their action being based upon the knowledge of causal relationships. If it is a species of faith, what program of action is there which does not involve faith in something?

"There are in Marxism two distinct strands, one a historical-sociological and the other an activist-revolutionary."<sup>(3)</sup>

The distinction seems to be entirely arbitrary in view of the fact that what makes Marx revolutionary is nothing but his historio-sociological philosophy.

"Lenin, of course, saw labor and the trade union movement, not as an aggregation of concrete individuals sharing among themselves their collective job opportunity, as well as trying to enlarge it and improve it by joint effort and step by step, but rather as an abstract mass which history had predetermined to hurl itself against the capitalist social order and demolish it.

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(2) *ibid.*, p.11

(3) *ibid.*, p.57



Lenin therefore could never have seen in a non-revolutionary unionism anything more than a blind groping after a purpose only vaguely grasped, rather than a completely self-conscious movement with a full-blown ideology of its own."<sup>(4)</sup>

Did not Lenin advocate the necessity of organization and propaganda because he was fully aware of the seemingly inherent "job-psychology" of labor and further because he believed the labor ideology is the product of the time?

"This ruthless philosophy (Marxism), ruthless not only towards the 'bourgeoisie,' but to the labor movement and to the laboring people as well, was originally the product of the 'will to revolution' of the intellectual who, like the prophet of old, has heard the voice of God and has dedicated his life to making God's will prevail on earth---except that the 'God' of the 'determinist-revolutionary' intellectual is not a personal God but the 'law' of the development of society."<sup>(5)</sup>

"Will to revolution" is a very complex term. If we could ever describe this phenomenon, "will to revolution," it will involve not only the description of the social condition then existent but also that of the ideal for which revolution is instrumental. Animal organism of *homo sapiens* as such does not have such an abstract thing as "will to revolution."<sup>(6)</sup> Further-

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(4) *ibid.*, p.9

(5) *ibid.*, pp.301-312

(6) "Will to ----" is an unfortunate hypostatization. It is a name to describe a certain complex phenomenon but used as if it were an independent distinct faculty. Prof. Perlman's definition of capitalism as being "the effective will to power of big businessmen who are undemocratically chosen" is also vague



more, if I were to interpret the above passage of Prof. Perlman as it is, I am compelled to suspect that he believes Marxism is a program of action which has nothing or very little to do with the knowledge of facts and causal relationships.

III. Though connected with the previous point, here is another question which needs scrutiny-----namely the psychology of people.

Marx has a passage<sup>e</sup> in his "These ad Feuerbach": "Human nature is not something abstract, inherent in each individual. In its actuality, human nature is the total sum of social relationships."

The<sup>is</sup> prophetic statement has been gradually confirmed through the advancement of scientific psychology. Organismic school in psychology (including German Gestaltists), the instrumentalists in philosophy, and monumental achievements of Bèchtere<sup>v</sup> are showing that the complex phenomena which we call human nature ~~is~~<sup>are</sup> the product of the interaction between the subject and the whole field in which he is located. Since equipotential character ~~is~~ of inheritance has been experimentally manifested, the part which visible and invisible social factors play in shaping one's ideology is decisively large.

Thus what each laborer believes or aspires to be is not inherent in himself but essentially constitutes one out of a bil-

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and abstract. Because, aside from the subjectiveness and the actual complexity of the term "will to power," this definition fails to be a definition of capitalism since substitution of the word "fascists" for "the big businessmen" will possibly give the definition of fascism. cf. Dewey: Human Nature and Conduct, Modern Library ed. (1930) pp.141-142. There is given an interesting analysis of what is called "will to power."





lion melting pots of innumerable and often invisible factors interacting within society. He may be conservative; and if he is so, he is so, not because conservatism is inherently in him, but because the social factors condition him to act in such a way as we happen to call it "conservative."

Furthermore, when the social configuration shifts from one stage to the other, <sup>an</sup> psychology of people also changes. What is the labor mentality of to-day is not <sup>the</sup> same as that of yesterday and no doubt will change to-morrow again.

It is upon the recognition of this fact that I question the soundness of argument which Prof. Perlman presents. Here is one of his characteristic passages:

"Yet, at bottom, the intellectual's conviction that labor must espouse the 'new social order' rests neither on statistically demonstrable trends in conditions nor on labor's stirrings for the sort of liberty expressed through the control of the ~~the~~ job, which anyone who knows workingmen will recognize and appreciate, but on a deeply rooted faith that labor is somehow the 'chosen vessel' of whatever may be the power which shapes the destiny of society." (7)

No doubt the present conservative labor psychology is deep-seated in the mind of <sup>the</sup> average working man. But by no means it is a sign that this psychology will not undergo a revolutionary change when a revolutionary ~~change~~ transformation occurs in <sup>the</sup> material basis of society. Prof. Perlman himself takes a note ~~of~~ in the shift of psychology from abundancy consciousness to scarcity

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(7) *ibid.*, p.281

consciousness as the <sup>the</sup> change in material basis takes such a direction.

Now if the ideology of labor group <sup>is</sup> a dynamic product of social development itself, it becomes highly important to make a distinction between what it is and what it ought to be. "Sein" in labor material conditions and its ideology is far from satisfactory at the present time. "Sollen" aims to bring about this satisfactory conditions upon the basis of material possibilities, using the knowledge of causal relationships as its necessary tool.

Labor, however, who <sup>is</sup> has been long subjected to the state of illiteracy, being <sup>m</sup> jammed between oppression and poverty, is not in the position of knowing its potentialities. It may develop its "homegrown" philosophy, but there is no guarantee that this philosophy is most beneficial to labor itself. When a sick child refuses to take a dose, persuasion is necessary. What revolutionary intellectuals like Marx and Lenin proposed to do is to lead the working class from the state of "Sein" into "Sollen," the path for which workers themselves are unable to discern, not because they are inherently incapable of doing so, but merely because they have been socially subjected to illiteracy for centuries.

I have noticed that Prof. Perlman is quite consistent in maintaining that labor has such and such inherent quality and that intellectuals have imposed their own romantic ideal upon labor without understanding the true psychology of labor. Certainly to know the labor psychology, characteristic of those people who are under that particular social environment, is one thing, but to lay down a program of action for the improvement of that very



environment is another thing. The former is necessary for the latter and is incomplete without the latter.

But as a warning against the usual disregard of daily wishes and opinions of workers by the overenthusiastic intellectuals, Prof Perlman's emphasis upon studying "Sein" in its immediate concreteness is anything but impertinent.