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EDITORIAL

WORKINGMEN, BE READY!

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE world underwent prodigious changes, physical, moral and mental, in the last century. No transformation so radical in its organism and structure had taken place in previous periods of thousands of years, as occurred in the last hundred. The evolution was rather limited to a few countries in the first half of the century. Until 1850, leaving aside the United States, which were a new nation, born in special conditions at the birth of the new spirit, England and France were practically the only ones of importance where the changes were sufficiently great to be perceptible to any but the students of economic and social phenomena. Germany was hardly then emerging from the feudal system. That status of the peasantry, which was the chief characteristic of feudalism and was termed in English "villeinage," had been theoretically abolished in Prussia by the royal decrees of 1807 and 1811. But the "great measures," intended to provide for the execution of those decrees and known in history as the "Stein and Hardenberg legislation," proved inadequate until a law was passed on March 2, 1850, "for the redemption of services and dues, and the regulation of the relations between the lords of the manor and their peasants," together with a supplementary law "for the establishment of rent-banks." While the factory system had already then slightly developed beyond the Rhine in a few branches, the far larger mass of German industry was still in the artisan stage, and German commerce was almost entirely of the old middle class sort and calibre. Austria was a mere political aggregation of small "nationalities," widely separated otherwise by those wide differences of race tradition, language and mode of life, which are still to-day, though less than formerly, the cause of her inferiority. Italy was a mere "geographical expression." Idle Spain, extinct as a world's power, was living upon the few colonies which England, as the "champion of human liberty," had considerately left to her as a reward for the resistance of her people to Napoleon's despotism. Russia was plunged in barbarism, dreaming of conquest on the Genghis Khan or Tamerlane plan, but as yet unaware of the superiority of Capitalism to pure and simple Militarism as an

instrument of universal dominion, and caring far less for industry or commerce than for the least bit of caviar.

To the man who can look back so far only as fifty years ago, the sublunary world of to-day seems indeed an entirely new planet, so vastly has enlarged the comparatively small spot of capitalism that had painfully developed during the first part of the Nineteenth Century and so displaced has its center been. We need not make here its present picture; all who have eyes can see. But what most of them can not or will not see is the rate at which the spot is growing and its intensity increasing. At this rate it is safe to say that the next ten years, even if science and invention should by impossibility come to a dead stop during that period, will work out greater changes than the last fifty have done. With the means already now at the command of Capitalism, nothing short of the Social Revolution can prevent its all-absorbing evolution.

But by the side of Capitalism moves another force, likewise all-absorbing but with a still greater rate of speed and intensity. Chaotic at first like Capitalism itself in its primary stage of competition, it concentrated and solidified as the latter progressed in organization and power. Fifty years ago, it began to emerge from its preliminary utopian condition and to assume the palpable form of class-conscious Revolutionary Socialism. The conflict between the two forces for the possession of the world is steadily going on; but the time is obviously coming fast when the final clash between them will necessarily take place. Get ready for it, workingmen of America!

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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