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When Is The People “Ready” For Freedom?

Johann Most

1884

“Not yet, by a long chalk!” is what the world’s blackguards have been answering since time immemorial. Today, things are not so much better as worse in this regard, since we have people agreeing with this sentiment who otherwise behave as if they were working for the highest possible human happiness. sentiment who otherwise behave as if they were working for the highest possible human happiness.

It is easy to understand some crown prince or other declaring that the people are not “ready” for freedom; after all, if he were to say the opposite, he would be showing just how superfluous he is and signing his own death warrant.

In the same way, unless he is going to deny his own right to exist, no aristocrat, bureaucrat, lawyer or other mandarin of the government or the “law” can concede that the people might be “ready”. True, we know from the proverb that the world is ruled with unbelievably little wisdom; but however stupid these state layabouts may be, they still have enough gumption to realize that a people fit for freedom will soon cease to put up with their slavery.

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All the clerical and literary preachers who exist, indeed, entirely depend on being the guardians of the people, and who therefore exert themselves to the utmost to try and befuddle the human brain with their twaddle about the Bible and the Talmud, their newspaper humbug and theatrical garbage, their sophistry and trashy novels, their falsifications of history and their philosophical rubbish — in short, with hundreds of different sorts of hogwash — they will always be trotting out something about the “immaturity” of the people.

The swells and other fat-faced philistines who, though one can read their stupidity on their faces, feel, in their positions as exploiting parasites and state-protected robbers, as happy in this stage of unfreedom as pigs in muck, naturally rub their hands in glee and nod well-contented approval when their mouthpieces, declaiming from their pulpits, lecterns, desks, and podiums, seek to prove to the people that it is not ready for freedom and that therefore it must be plundered, pillaged, and fleeced.

The average man in the street has something of the ape or parrot about him. This explains why it is that hundreds of thousands go round cutting their own throats by squawking to others what those cunning mind-warpers have proclaimed. We are too stupid for freedom — alas, how stupid, stupid, stupid we are!

This is all perfectly comprehensible. What, however, is not comprehensible is that people who make themselves out to be advocates of the proletariat likewise hawk round this hoary old legend about the people’s “unreadiness” and the resulting temporary impossibility of allowing it to take possession of its freedom.

Is this just ignorance or a deliberate crime?

Let these people speak for themselves; they show clearly and distinctly enough in both their speeches and writings that:

1. the consequences of modern society will in themselves bring about its destruction.

2. one of the most terrible consequences of the system we have today is the gradually increasing deterioration of large sectors of the population, their physical enervation and spiritual demoralization.
3. today's state of enslavement must be succeeded by a state of freedom.

In other words, what they are saying is this: in the first case, the society we have now is heading for inevitable collapse; in the second case, the people grow steadily more and more wretched (i.e. less and less "ready" for freedom) the longer the present set-up exists.

Hence, when such philosophers, despite such statements, exclaim in moving tones that the people are not yet "ripe" for freedom, they cannot do other than concede, in conformity with their own doctrine, that this "readiness" will be even more lacking later on.

Is it, then, that these people are incapable of following the train of their own thought from established fact to resulting conclusion? If this were the case, they would indeed be dunderheads and, at the very least, not sufficiently "mature" to set themselves up as educators of the people. Or is their crippled logic perfectly clear to them, and are they — in order to play the whore with the people — making it dance around on the crutches of purpose? If this were the case, they would be criminal blackguards.

Wait! — someone cries in defense of these people — we have found a way of counteracting the degenerating effects of capitalism and making the people ready for freedom despite everything. We enlighten. All well and good! But who has told you that the speed at which things are evolving will leave you enough time to carry out your so-called enlightenment in a systematic way? You yourselves do not believe in that kind of magic.

But what do you want?

We provoke; we stoke the fire of revolution and incite people to revolt in any way we can. The people have always been “ready” for freedom; they have simply lacked the courage to claim it for themselves.

We are convinced that necessity is, and will remain, the overriding factor in the struggle for freedom and that therefore hundreds of thousands of men and women will in time appear on the scene as fighters for freedom without ever having heard our call to arms; and we are content, as it were, to construct — by training those who we are able to reach now — sluices which may well prove apt to direct the natural lava-flow of social revolution into practical channels.

As in every previous great social cataclysm, the “readiness” of the people will reveal itself in all its majesty at the moment of conflict — not before, nor after.

And then, too, as always, it will become apparent that it is not the theorists and “enlightened” pussy-footers who will provide the reeling society with a new solid foundation, but those miraculous forces when they are needed. Practical children of nature who, until that point, have lived quiet and modest existences, reach out suddenly to take steps of which no philosopher in the whole wide world could ever have dreamed in a hundred years. The readiness for freedom is then customarily documented in the most astonishing fashion.

It is, therefore, a piece of monstrous idiocy on the part of any socialist to maintain that the people are not “ready” for freedom.

Everyone who does not number among the exploiters complains that others are more privileged than he. Far and wide, it is clear that the people are dissatisfied with their lot. And if it does not know yet what to replace the present set-up with, it will discover it at the moment when something practical can be done in this regard; which is — immediately.