

Roosevelt

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Many attempts have been made to explain the causes of Roosevelt's reappearance upon the political stage and the formation of the Progressive party. In these attempts emphasis has mostly been laid upon the increasing resistance of the lower strata of the bourgeoisie to the rule of the Trusts, as well as upon the necessity of catching the workers with social reforms; but it must be plain to everyone that the characterization of the new party as "petty-capitalistic" is inadequate. In the formation of this new party we have to do not only with a split of the old historic parties—for similar tendencies are found in the Democratic party as well—but also with a new orientation of thought, at first hesitant and vague, which, rising from the instinctive feeling of the bourgeoisie itself, is now beginning to appear in politics. It indicates that social conditions in America have undergone a radical transformation, and at the same time it ushers in a new political era. The nature of this transformation cannot be understood by means of ideas derived from earlier party struggles; a comparison with European politics may be helpful.

The man of the new era is Roosevelt. To the mind still fettered by the old ideas, he incarnates the contradictions of the new political movement. Seldom has a man been subjected to such contradictory judgments as has Roosevelt. At one time he is hailed as a great statesman who earnestly seeks to master the problems of the future, not only for Americans but also for all humanity. At another time he is the man of brute force, the cowboy in politics, a beast of prey with great gnashing teeth. Again he is the man of the people, the reformer, fighting valiantly for the general interests of the commonwealth against trustified capital; and with his reform program he appears to many of our comrades, who see little more in Socialism than a bundle of immediate reforms, to be a dangerous competitor, a counterfeit, a "near-Socialist." But the great majority of our party members regard him simply as an impostor, a demagogue; and indeed it is a fact that he is closely connected with trustified capital, that he defends the "Big Interests" energetically, and that he attacks the working class movement with immoderate hatred and contemptible means. However contradictory all this may appear, it is correct nevertheless, and the sum total gives an insight into the nature, not so much of the man—his personal traits are rather unimportant—as into the nature of American society, which pushes to the front a man of such characteristics.

America is not merely the land of capitalism at its height; here also the spirit of capitalism, the reckless piling up of profits, has reached its greatest development and become the all-ruling power. The pursuit of the dollar occupies the entire life of men; business reigns supreme in their thoughts and acts; all their ideas and efforts are directed toward

business success. All the energy, all the powers of man he bends to personal success and advancement. The American regards the whole world as existing merely to enrich him and make him a respectable citizen; to him the Star Spangled Banner is the symbol of unrestricted liberty to pile up profits. The idea never enters his mind that there are other important interests, common to all, to which he must, in some degree, subordinate his personal interests.

Now this is not the result of any special character of the American people, but a manifestation of the character of the capitalist, the bourgeois, the business man throughout the world. Everywhere the capitalists have directed all their thoughts and deeds toward personal gain. But elsewhere there is also present, to a greater or less extent, the consciousness of a general interest, of membership in a larger community to which the private interest must be subordinated. The general interests and the larger community of which we speak here are not the really general, popular interests, nor humanity as a whole, but the classes and their interests. A class embraces all those who stand in the same position in the process of production and hence have common interests; the general interests to which private interests must be subordinated temporarily, are *common class interests*. The field of these interests is *politics*; the task of the politicians is to champion the interests of their class against the other classes, or the interests of the various groups of the bourgeoisie against one another, the interests generally being hidden behind abstract catch-words and theoretical party formulas. By means of their political struggles the politicians now and then compel even the business men to reflect over their class interests.

That is lacking in America. As expressed by the English writer, H. G. Wells, in his book, "The Future of America," the American has no sense of the State, he is "State-blind." To him politicians are useless parasites on the bodies of worthy people who earn their bread by the manufacture of gloves or the sale of rice and raisins. And rightly so. For in America politics is a business, a private business of the politician. Politics is "graft," the making of a profit through official position. That every official from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to the policeman or alderman uses his political power for his personal enrichment is a matter of course in America. That the two great bourgeois parties, the Republican as well as the Democratic, are nothing else than well organized bands of politicians, reaching through their followers down into the criminal dives, for whom the control of political office is merely a means to private advantage, is known to every child, and only in Europe do people wonder at it. This political corruption does not signify that Americans are more dishonest than other people; it is merely the transference to politics of the morals of business in which, as is well-known, fraud plays a principal part.

And therein lies a radical difference between politics in America and in Europe. Even in Europe it is an ordinary occurrence for politicians to use their position for personal advantage; but there it is done incidentally, in a shamefaced way, and is publicly censured as an impropriety. Their chief duty is to defend the interests of their class. Let us glance at Germany. The Catholic (Centre party) members of the Reichstag may occasionally seek to obtain good posts for their friends, but the main object of their politics is to fight for their peasants, for the Catholic landowners and capitalists, and for the interests of the Church. The Conservative landowners in the Reichstag do not dare to neglect for personal advantage the common interests of the noble landowners, and these interests also include the strengthening of the power of the monarchy against the Parliament and the furthering of all reactionary tendencies in the State; nor can the Liberal politicians lose sight for a moment of the general interests of the great capitalists. In addition they all have to represent the common interests of the entire possessing class against the claims of the workers and the demands of the Socialists. Therein lies the essential difference between politics in Europe and in America; in Europe politics is the field upon which the

general class interests are asserted; in America politics is merely a special field for private interests.

If we seek the cause of this difference we are led at once to the different historic development. In Europe the bourgeoisie was able to advance only by continual struggle against other classes: the nobility, the clergy, and the princely houses, which originated in the mediaeval method of production. Bourgeois society was able to come into existence only by overthrowing feudalism and absolutism, and that was possible only through a struggle, a class struggle against the powers which had ruled under the earlier social order. In this struggle came into being a clearly defined bourgeois class consciousness; the capitalists, petty bourgeoisie and peasants learned in a practical manner that they must sacrifice treasure and blood for their ideals, for "liberty" and "Fatherland"—which terms formed the idealized expression of their class interests. In the struggle against the ancient powers they learned that there was something higher than their personal private interests, a broader duty that must be fulfilled as prerequisite, if they were to pursue undisturbed their private interests. And even after the decisive battles in the bourgeois revolutions had been fought, the struggle continued; nobility and royalty maintained the fight for their privileges in and against the parliament. But when this struggle gradually came to an end, the proletariat appeared as a new and distinct class that carried on the struggle against the bourgeoisie. And once more this class struggle prevented the capitalists from thinking only of their private enrichment and from regarding the entire world merely from the viewpoint of business; since the entire profit-making system and all business was threatened they must be defended, and this defense of the bourgeois order was to the common interest of the entire bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, the American bourgeoisie has never had to carry on great class struggles.

Amerika, du hast es besser
Als unser Weltteil, der alte,
Hast keine verfallene Schlösser
Und keine Basalte.¹

In these lines of a German poet is expressed the reason why America is envied by the European bourgeoisie, which in agonizing struggles fought its way upward against the powers of the Middle Ages. America has known no feudalism, no absolutism, and hence the struggles against them are unknown to her. From the very beginning, since the War of Independence, America has been a purely bourgeois country, with but a single class, a middle class, a rising bourgeoisie. Thus in the absence of other classes, it was not possible for a bourgeois class develop self-consciousness. No deep-rooted class struggle made it necessary to turn from the business of making money; what the European bourgeoisie won painfully and was ever obliged to defend, was a matter of course to the American men of business. The great internal struggles of the Republic, such as the Civil war of 1861, were only conflicts between the business interests of diverse groups of the bourgeoisie; for the slave holders of the South were just as much capitalist exploiters as were the manufacturers of the North. Even the workers found for decades such favorable opportunity for personal advancement that they felt themselves to be a portion of the lower strata of the middle class, developed no clear proletarian class consciousness and gave no thought to a class struggle against the capitalist social order. Where class struggles are lacking, politics is not utilized as a field upon which the general class interests come in conflict; hence politics became a private business.

¹ America, it is better with thee than with our continent, the old, thou hast no ruined castles and no basaltic columns.

If this explanation is correct, it follows that this state of affairs cannot continue and that a change must take place. For Socialism is coming to the front, and although it is not yet a great material power, it is already an intellectual one. Before the eyes of American society there is emerging in the distance the spectre of the proletarian revolution which threatens to put an end to all business and all profit. As yet the bourgeoisie is incapable of comprehending, even with moderate clearness, the extent and nature of this danger and of discreetly arming against it. Here, raging blindly, it beats down the striking workers by force, there politicians beguile them with Socialistic demands; and again the professional politicians of both bourgeois parties, after being driven out of office, combine against the Socialists, who have introduced an honest municipal government; but in general the majority of the American bourgeoisie cares nothing at all for politics. Naturally this cannot continue. The more Socialism advances, the stronger does bourgeois class consciousness become; the defense of the bourgeois order against the new enemy must come to be regarded as of paramount importance and politics must be pressed into the service of this cause. In the formation of the Progressive party we see the first signs of a great change, namely, the evolution of American politics from private business and graft to class politics.

Roosevelt is the leader in this new conception of political activity; he has become clearly conscious of the general interests of the bourgeoisie. His superiority to other American politicians lies in the fact that he is no business politician, but has a sharp sense of politics as an instrument of class interests. Hence he talks eagerly of the community of the nation, to whose general interests private interests must yield; but the community that he means is always the bourgeois world, the bourgeoisie, and has nothing at all in common with that which Socialism understands by the community of the entire people; on the contrary it is diametrically opposed to it. Hence there is no contradiction in the fact that at the same time he represents the interests of great capital, not only in internal affairs, but also external, as an imperialistic world-politician. But he does not represent it in the sense that he unconditionally submits to the predatory desires of the Trusts; while many a President and many a Cabinet Officer has been in his official capacity the mere clerk of Morgan and Rockefeller, Roosevelt confronts the Trust magnates as an independent power; he understands that trustified capital must yield somewhat, in order that its intolerable tyranny may not endanger capitalism as a whole. When he urges reforms he does so only in order to render the capitalist system the more impregnable. He hates Socialism from the very depths of his soul; indeed there is, perhaps, no other man in America who hates Socialism so deeply, so thoroughly, so extravagantly as he does. Others may feel themselves to be threatened by the labor movement in their private business or in their political swindling; their hatred is private, petty hatred, such as they also have for their competitors. But in him lives and trembles all the fear and anxiety of the ruling classes face to face with the overthrow of bourgeois society, which appears to him as the end of civilization, the end of the world; this at times whips him to deeds of senseless rage. As the capitalist class regards any means as justifiable in the struggle against the rebellious proletariat, he too is capable of anything; but he does not yet know what he wants. His impulsive, vacillating acts are the expression of the uncertainty of the American bourgeoisie in its attitude toward the new enemy. Rough, unscrupulous and brutal, well-informed and crafty, he is just the man whom the American bourgeoisie needs in the new struggle, and to whom it looks as a future leader and ruler. His appearance in his latest role is a proof that Socialism in America is beginning to become a serious matter.

Thus are explained the apparent contradictions in his behavior. The Progressive party is not simply a reform party; reforms constitute one of the means of strengthening the bourgeois order against Socialism, but attempts at repression by force are also occurring everywhere, and no one will believe that Roosevelt is too soft-hearted for such work.

Nor is it a semi-Socialist party competing with Socialism and taking the wind out of its sails; when it attempts to inveigle the workers, it does so as a capitalist party, which seeks to counteract the awakening of a proletarian class consciousness. Therefore the struggle against it is best adapted to awaken a pronounced Socialist class feeling, since we can no longer advance through indignation against the Trusts or against political corruption. Only those who see in the Socialist movement a mere striving for social reform or honest municipal government, have any occasion to regard the Progressive party as a competitor.

But just as little is the Progressive party a petty-bourgeois party. Therein lies the difference, in spite of many points of contact, between it and the Democratic party, between Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. This does not mean that they do not exhibit common traits, for the characters of the various parties are as yet not definitely formed. The parties grope instinctively under the influence of newly born and still obscure feelings, moods and needs, and practically they do not as yet show the sharp delineation of definite, antagonistic characters, which we here emphasize theoretically in order to comprehend them more clearly. But if we keep this limitation in mind, we may say that one party, the Democratic, is essentially petty-capitalistic; its purpose is—in theory only, for in practice these parties can govern only in the interests of great capital—to trim down the modern capitalistic and monopolistic structures which do not fit into the picture of capitalism, and which therefore seem to it to be defects, abnormalities and foreign bodies; it incarnates the rebellion of the mass of the bourgeoisie against the pressure of the Trusts and against trustified government. The other party, the Progressive, is essentially a party of capitalism in general; it incarnates the growing bourgeois consciousness of the proletarian menace, and demands from the Trusts only such consideration and self-limitation as is necessary to the maintenance of the bourgeois order; hence it can without hypocrisy play the politics of great capital. The one party is reactionary, just as are the majority of petty bourgeois parties in Europe, in so far as it seeks, theoretically at least, to reduce capitalism to an earlier stage; the other party is conservative (like the liberal parties in Europe) in so far as its purpose is to uphold existing capitalism and to prevent further progress toward Socialism. To be sure, this contrast does not exhaustively portray the characters of these two parties. But it is certain that the appearance upon the political stage of Roosevelt and the Progressive party signifies the beginning of a consolidation of the bourgeoisie into a class party, the combination of all the forces of bourgeois society in the struggle against Socialism and the beginning of the final struggle of Socialism for a new social order.