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Wellington S. Gibbs.

By

GREAT BRITAIN.

IN

MODERN SOCIAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In the world-wide social unrest of to-day every one seems to have the confident feeling that we have parted with the past and are now standing on the threshold of a new world. Not only in Russia does this unrest exist, and this hope for the future, but also in Great Britain, the United States, Germany, the Argentine, Canada and in nearly every civilized nation. Great and fundamental changes are taking place which go to the very roots of the social, economic, political and intellectual life of the people. Although each nation must work out its own problems along lines determined by the particular genius of its people, still the leaders of thought and action all over the world must often turn their eyes with confidence to Great Britain for an example of fairness and moderation.

There can be little doubt that Great Britain to-day is passing through one of the greatest periods of change in her history. The normal course of development and evolution in her social and political institutions has been so accelerated by the war that future generations will doubtless designate the present time as the beginning of a great revolution. For it appears that within a very few years the whole national fabric both economically, politically and constitutionally will have been fundamentally changed.

The keynote and inspiring idea in all the changes that are going on seems to be "democracy". The experiences of the great civilian army, both at home and abroad, coupled with the



free and easy mingling of all classes of the community including the members of the Royal Family, all sharing in a common danger, a common effort, common sacrifices, and a common victory, have doubtless contributed in no small degree to the demand for greater democracy in every phase of life.

It seems to be in the spheres of industry and politics that the loudest demands are made for democracy. Ever since the great industrial revolution about the end of the eighteenth century when steam power and machinery came to be used in manufacture and the consequent growth of large industrial cities, there have been growing and persistent demands for a fuller measure of democratic control in both politics and industry. In the realm of politics although there have been the great Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884 giving parliamentary representation to these large industrial centres and extending the franchise, there are many people who claim that the nation is still as far from having democratic government as ever. Some of these hold that under the present form of parliamentary government it is impossible to have a really democratic government. In the realm of industry the past century has witnessed the growth of powerful trade unions and labor organizations. But until very recently these have had little, if any, democratic control.

Nor has the State ever taken any very effective action. For a century or more the industrial and business world has been left to drift along according to the "laissez-faire" doctrine of unrestricted competition. The state of affairs before the war was the natural result of the transitional epoch following the industrial revolution.

But now the nation has passed the transitional stage in industry. Every one seems to agree that there must be a re-organization of the whole economic and industrial fabric on lines of co-operation and good will under the guiding hand of the State. The war has given the nation a rude jolt and shaken her out of the rut in which she had been drifting for so long. She has been shaken to her very foundations. Mental life has been quickened. There is a fresh energy in tackling both old and new problems. There seems to be a different attitude towards life, - a different outlook. Is it the democratic outlook?

This awakening was mainly brought about by the nation having to face at least three very ugly and serious facts which emerged during the first year or two of the war, and which threatened her very existence.

The first of these was the realization of the deplorable place which science occupied in industry, in business management, in agriculture, and in the whole educational system. The seriousness of this state of affairs was first brought home to the nation by the insufficient and unsatisfactory supply of munitions in the early stages of the war.

The second disconcerting discovery was the dangerously low ebb the national physique had reached as revealed by the recruiting of the army. How was a 0 3 population to defend itself in the national peril? And even if it did manage to survive the present crisis, what was the nation's immediate future likely to be?

The third ugly fact was the threat in 1917 of having the national food supply cut off by the German submarine warfare.

Agriculture had been so neglected for more than half a century that the nation had become altogether too dependent upon outside sources for its food.

Confronted with such serious facts as these together with all that they meant and might mean in the future, is there any wonder that the whole people became aroused and set themselves to remedying these defects before it was too late? To continue any longer in the old policy of blindly "muddling along" could lead ultimately to only one result, — national decay.

But these were not the only problems that required attention. Thoughtful and far-seeing statesmen had already become convinced that it would be impossible after the war to return to pre-war conditions by reason of certain changes and innovations of sheer necessity that had come during the war. Among the more conspicuous of these was the evident advantage of large scale production, by co-operation under government control, over private competition on a smaller scale. The government control of the railways of the country throughout the war had furnished a notable example of what may be possible in peace time. It was claimed that unification of the railways would effect a saving of £20,000,000 annually. The status of the labouring classes had been greatly raised during the war. This had resulted largely from the nation being so dependent for its safety upon the co-operation of such classes of the workers as the miners, munition workers, ship-builders, and railway men. Their leaders were now sharing in the nation's most important duties of government. The standard of living among the great mass of the population had been very materially raised. Thousands of men and women, both in the army