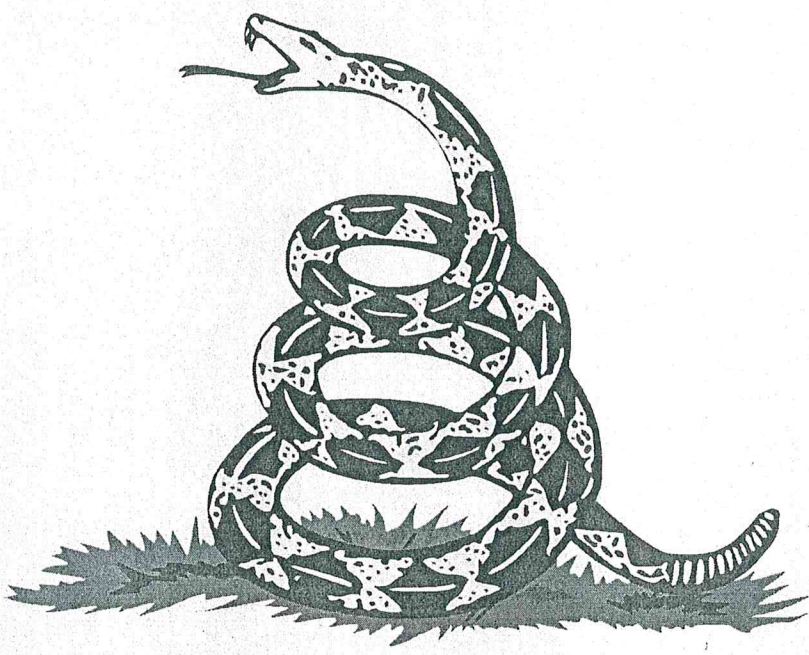


NEILSON, FRANK
ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE
LAWLESS
1920-1924

THE FREEMAN BOOK



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ALBERT JAY NOCK

in dialectics or to do his thinking for him. Doing any one's thinking is no part of this paper's business; to attempt it is an immense and silly pretension. We are glad of the privilege, however, of encouraging independent thought along what seems to us a profitable and infrequently chosen line, and of pointing out such waymarks as are known to us. A. J. N. 16. vi. 20.

ILLUSIONS OF THE LANDLESS

THE news from Italy of the metal-workers' strike is particularly interesting because it exhibits practically all the elements of the Russian industrial revolution. In Milan and Turin the workers have occupied the factories, and in many respects they seem to be masters of the situation, but they are masters only in name and for the time, for already they are finding how difficult it is to take over the factories and run them in the interests of labour unless they have the good will and support of the supervisors and the technicians. It has not taken them long to find out that under this economic system administration is a factor to be reckoned with in any industrial revolution. A dispatch from Rome says that "the men have no adequate direction and expert advice in carrying on the work of the different factories, and are declared to have made advances to technical employees, asking them to make common cause with the workers." It seems that the Engineers' Association has emphatically declined this suggestion; which is quite to be expected because the technical expert is as a rule, by his social and industrial affiliations, remote from socialist theory of any kind. It is true that technicians of socialist persuasion are not infrequently found in professional associations, but their influence on the body of their associates seldom in a political sense, extends very far.

The primary question seems to be whether it is practically possible for the Italian workers to take over the factories and run them successfully without the co-operation of technical and administrative experts. In Russia, Lenin found out very soon that

it could not be done. Indeed, one of the most significant incidents of the industrial revolution in Russia was the quickness with which Lenin saw the grave danger of utter industrial chaos, and the alacrity of his move away from the principles of Marxian socialism to what is called by loose thinkers the individualistic system, and his coming to terms with the experts of industry. Whether Lenin's course will be followed by the workers in Italy, remains to be seen, but from the advices that have reached us it looks as though the employers and the experts are at agreement to permit the industrial revolution there to come to a chaotic end.

There is, moreover, to be considered how the workers are to be supplied with the necessary raw materials. All the dispatches received here from Milan, Turin and Rome indicate quite clearly the enormous difficulties the workers have to contend with in finding supplies of raw material. In this matter the Italian industrial revolutionists are at an unusual disadvantage. They, unlike the Russians, have a system of landlordism which is all in favour of the employers, the technicians and the administrators. In Russia, raw materials of all kinds were to be had, but not so in Italy; coal, coke, crude oil, and other such primary necessities have to be imported, or can be obtained at home only in trifling amounts. Semi-raw materials of all kinds are imported in huge quantities.

Here is another case of industrial revolution apparently doomed to defeat, because it is begun at the wrong end of the economic scale. The Italian industrial revolution will almost surely end disastrously; and those who will be hit hardest will be the workers themselves, for they have done just what the French did on several occasions, and what the Russians also did. They have made their start by taking over the factories, without first dealing with the landlord, who is the supreme ruler of the natural resources from which labour has to draw all raw materials, and the landlord will reveal a power, over their revolution, far more effective than the power that any government can exert or that the co-operating employers and the technicians can exert. Then, further, the Italian situation shows clearly that it is impossible for

the workers to carry out any industrial revolution under the present economic system, until economic internationalization has taken place. The employers and technicians can put a stop to the importation of the supplies of raw material, and at the same time they can neutralize domestic and foreign markets so far as the purchase of manufactured articles is concerned. They themselves can afford to wait while the revolutionists are piling up a mountain of difficulties. They may have to go on what is for them short commons, for a time, but men in that position usually have something put by for a rainy day. It is tolerably certain that the workers will be reduced to extremities long before their opponents feel the pinch of poverty. And in all this conflict the employers, the technicians, the supervisors, and the administrators of industry have the landlord at their backs in the absolutely impregnable position that he has always occupied under our economic system. The holder of natural resources can laugh at any and every industrial revolution which is begun by the "socialization of industry."

The capitalistic system arose from the expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil. That is the fundamental fact pointed out by Marx in "Das Kapital," but as he does it in the last chapter, most of his disciples have never discovered it and are unaware that he has pointed it out at all. That was the way by which the worker was deprived of his economic alternative, and the worker without an alternative is in a hopeless position. Strikes and industrial revolutions take place with increasing frequency, bringing only an illusion to the landless, to the expropriated masses who have been thrust into the labour market, there to compete with one another and depress wages. These strikes and revolutions have value of the kind that we have often remarked, and are not to be deprecated; but otherwise they are futile. The only sound beginning is by first undoing the wrong that Marx referred to, by dealing scientifically with the land-question. The labour-question is the land-question. Socialists, whether led by Lenin or Malatesta or Sidney Webb or Eugene Debs, might profitably turn from the Italian news-

dispatches to muse upon Marx's great chapter on the modern theory of colonization. Not until this economic lesson is thoroughly learned can any effective reform of industry take place. It must be clearly understood that private ownership of economic rent is the root of all the present industrial discontent. No one has put this quite so clearly as Tolstoy :

It is sufficient to understand all the criminality, the sinfulness, of the situation in this respect, in order to understand that until this atrocity, continually being committed by the owners of the land, shall cease, no political reforms will give freedom and welfare to the people, but that, on the contrary, only the emancipation of the majority of the people from that land-slavery in which they are now held can render political reforms, not a plaything and a tool for personal aims in the hands of politicians, but the real expression of the will of the people.

Neither political nor industrial reforms will give freedom to the people. What did political reform do for France? What has it done for England? What did the most highly specialized developments of paternalism do for Germany? There is only one thing to be done first, and this is to re-impropriate the mass of the people upon the soil by the confiscation of economic rent. Mere haphazard and superficial revolutionary activity, whatever its collateral value—and it is bound to be relatively slight—is sterile. Henry George said :

Social reform is not to be secured by noise and shouting, by complaints and denunciation, by the formation of parties or the making of revolutions, but by the awakening of thought and the progress of ideas. Until there be correct thought there can not be right action, and when there is correct thought right action will follow.

Perhaps the Italian industrial revolution will provide a salutary illustration of this great truth, no matter what apparent benefit may accrue to the workers in the terms they make with the employers. Only apparent they will be, no matter how impressively the revolution may end, for whatever the power wielded by Italian labour, it will be found that a greater power is silently,

constantly, at work frustrating labour's efforts and hopes; and this power is the landlord's.

F. N. 22. ix. 20.

THE BASES OF THE FIVE ESSENTIALS

WHEN we look back to that remote period immediately following the announcement of the armistice-terms, when all the world was talking about a lasting peace and reconstruction and the dawn of a new era, we recall the unanimity with which most people at that time believed that at least five specific reforms were essential to the upbuilding of the new world: 1. A peace based on reason and justice. 2. The abolition of economic, commercial and financial imperialism. 3. The removal of tariff-barriers. 4. The abolition of armaments. 5. The abolition of secret diplomacy.

These were regarded as lofty aims, it is true; but after all those years of sorrow, who could dare ask for less? The common people of all countries were not alone in believing that the new era would at once be ushered in with the achievement of these reforms; but men in high places, leaders of opinion, declared these aims to be a practical residuum of good precipitated from all the evil that the world had so long endured. Even those who were sceptical of the large promise of a new world were ready to accept the smaller promise of a new Europe. So much, at least, was considered to be within the sphere of practical politics, even of the kind in vogue in Paris during the spring of 1919. Indeed, so confident were the reconstructionists that they were content to leave to their so-called representatives in Paris the whole business of building the new era and even the lesser task of making a new Europe. The treaty of peace was an unconscionable time coming, just as it now is an unconscionable time dying, but when at last its terms were made public the world was not slow to realize that the five essentials were not there, nor any faint hint or promise of them.

One would hesitate to go back over all this old ground and restate these too well-known facts, were it not that signs are