

The Prison that is Society

By Martha H. Foley

CRAMPED within a tiny cell a man sits staring through iron bars at a wall surmounted by spikes—a gaunt blank wall which bounds the horizon of his life. Beyond lie plains rioting with color, rivers and seas alive with ships, mountains that flame in the dawn, and cities seething with activity. Years ago there was hope of breaking those bars and escaping over the wall, but that was long ago. Now he would not know what to do with his freedom if he did attain it. So he sits staring, staring—a prisoner.

* * *

Bent over a roaring machine in a dust-filled room a man turns out metal disc after metal disc. His body quivers with the motions of the machine and perspiration blinds his eyes and runs down his naked breast. Somewhere a violinist is pouring out his soul in an ecstasy of music, pleading for a listening ear, somewhere hangs a painting in whose glowing colors is blended the life-blood of an artist, waiting for an appreciative eye, somewhere is shelved unread a book whose author starved that he might give forth its message. The hours come and go, eight, nine, ten, still the man stays fettered to his task of grinding out the shining bits of metal and the grinding into dust of his dreams.

* * *

A prisoner—one of the millions imprisoned by capitalist society, robbed of justice, robbed of beauty, robbed of life that the few may be glutted. Incarcerated in the shops, mines and factories, doomed to life-long toil whose fruits he may not taste. And woe unto him who ventures to tear asunder the irksome shackles or thrust even his hand beyond the bars that confine him! Society knows well how to punish, society can brand and crucify today as it has branded and crucified throughout the centuries.

Far back in the dim past, when primitive man first forced to slave for him the captive he had taken in tribal warfare, was laid the cornerstone of the prison that is society. Stone upon stone it was reared as serfdom followed chattel slavery until was erected the stronghold with many ramifications in the wage-slavery of today. Empires and the prisoners who under the lash sweat and bled for them

have passed away, but still the prison stands and sweating and bleeding prisoners fill it.

* * *

Laws should free, not restrict. Capitalism employs the law only to oppress the worker, for it itself knows no law. Let the inventor invent, if his product prove aught of value to his master, let the artist create if his creation may be exploited to the further gain of those that rule, let the student study if his knowledge can be subsidized; but let none advance beyond the wall. And society has supplied itself with guards to see that none transgress the prescribed bounds. There are many guards, great and small, but chief among them are the school, the church, the press, patriotism, the settlement, and the "employees' association." These and things which were once good in themselves, society seizes upon to serve its own terrible purpose and to thwart any budding desires toward the free life.

In the school all spontaneous instincts of originality in teacher or student are quickly suppressed. Perverted is the history and economics that are taught. There are the first chains forged that bind the future worker in his jail. Childhood with its fairies and hobgoblins, youth with its dreams and aspirations, society sees only as a fertile soil wherein to sow that which may be reaped as profits.

Religion, in one of its phases, is the outcome of man's groping toward the spiritual. The religious impulse—not superstitious faith in some ruling deity—is the indefinite expression of the finest in man. Society fears that finest and takes care that the church be one of its staunchest supporters. And the church doing its bidding, inculcates the supreme virtues of obedience, humility and and patience—prates of a reward after death. Deafened by its mouthings, the workers hear not the call of freedom.

One of the most vigilant of monitors is the press. Lie after lie it feeds to the workers until they cannot discern the true from the false. It converts the rattle of their chains into music and their liberation into destruction, so that from its pages they learn to clamor for the perpetuation of their slavery.

Another guard that society finds indispensable

to the maintenance of the inviolability of its prison is patriotism. To disrupt and separate worker from worker, to drain them of their energy, it pits nation against nation. The blood shed in these conflicts it laps up greedily, at the same time spurring the workers by words of praise to noble sacrifice. But they, blindly slaying each other, do not realize that they are also slaying the workers of the future and strengthening the walls that confine them.

* * *

At times there are disturbing signs of unrest among the inmates which must be quelled. Baits are thrown to them in the form of social welfare enterprises and employees associations. Misled by these "uplift" and "welfare" movements, overwhelmed by the "kindness" of their keepers, they become duly grateful and sheeplike. The chains seem to drag less heavily upon them. In truth they are fettered more firmly.

As to all that lies outside the prison, as to the birthright of freedom that is denied them, those inside know nothing and after long incarceration come to despise. Nature flaunting her ruby and gold sunsets, sweeping wild winds across seas silver with foam, or pouring night's jewels into silent pools, is but a source to derive material for toil; science which carries man among the uttermost stars and chains the lightning, that which increases and expedites their labor; and art echoing the soul's response to the beautiful, folly. Life is to slave, slave, slave or die.

Under the system of class rule society cannot possibly be anything but a vast prison. When it imprisons one worker it imprisons all, and not until all make a determined effort to free themselves can one be free. When the workers erect a new structure and in its erection demolish for all time their prison, when a world-wide Soviet replaces bourgeois democracy then will they breathe the fresh air into their lungs, live and be free men.

Sections of the prison are already crashing in ruins. In Russia and Hungary the workers have done away with their walls and their keepers and for the first time know freedom. And the gaps in the wall made by them render unsteady the whole. Soon will it fall and crumble, never to hold man prisoner again.

The N. E. C. Mobilizing Slanders

(Continued from Page 6)

willing to defend the N. E. C. "statement of principles" on the public platform? Where and when?

Says Oneal: "As there was an Ebert-Scheidemann gang in Germany, naturally they accepted the statement that we had one here too." Quite naturally.

The deliberate lies about the Left Wing votes continue. All of these votes are on file in the National office but are carefully withheld by order of the N. E. C. It is clear already that this is the biggest party referendum ever taken. The votes run high in the metropolitan centres and low in the smaller towns: that is the entire mystery of the fact that 25 per cent or 30 per cent of the members voted, while perhaps as many as 75 per cent did not vote. There are hundreds of locals in the United States which have been allowed virtually to die out by the old party regime, and from these half-dead locals there were no votes at all. This is the ordinary experience with referendums, except that there

was never a time before when the new national party executives were elected by such large votes.

Now the question arises, why didn't the supporters of Oneal make it their business to get ballots and vote? Or is it really possible that they were as few as the votes indicate? Of course it is no very great effort for party members to find the opportunity to vote, and at least it is not charged that anybody who wanted to vote for Oneal was denied the full and free chance to do so. But there were ever so few who sought the opportunity. Strange, indeed. But what can you expect of a party that is all in the whirl of the Left Wing brainstorm? One might suggest the alternative of unfitness of Oneal to represent the militant proletariat of America, but that would be crediting the members of the Socialist Party with discriminating intelligence.

The Left Wing has never conducted "a campaign against the Socialist Party." Nor have the Federations ever conducted such a campaign. But a successful campaign was

conducted against opportunistic reformism as the essence of our party activities. The Left Wing criticisms which had their legitimate basis in intelligent participation in the party functioning, were barred from the party press and the Left Wing adherents were fired out of the party by the reactionaries who happened to control the executive committees. Thus arose the necessity for a separate Left Wing press and finally for Left Wing organization taking on a national scope.

Not to have carried on this campaign within the party would have constituted a betrayal of the world proletariat in the great struggle now going on, under the banner of the Communist International, against the united Imperialisms. To have waged this campaign and to have won it is an achievement of tremendous significance for a Socialist movement in the United States of revolutionary proletarian consciousness.

There remains now the great task of the reorganization of the party according to the Left Wing program.