Title: The Coming Revolution in Great Britain

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THE COMING REVOLUTION
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THE COMING REVOLUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN

by

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WITH A PREFACE

by

GEORGE LANSBURY

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PREFACE

BY GEORGE LANSBURY

'Curses, like chickens, come home to roost,' and 'promises, like pie-crusts, are made to be broken:' these sayings which we learned in our childhood contain much more than an element of truth—they are truth.

The classes in power throughout the world are in that position solely because they and their predecessors have pinned their faith to the doctrine of 'might is right.' The whole basis of society rests on armed force, ready at all times to be used on the side of vested interests and special privilege. Now and then one class replaces another, and sometimes a tiny section is able to exercise power. In every case there is no real 'consent of the governed' to be governed.

There is, of course, a kind of tacit or implied acquiescence, which is a very different thing. People accept the ills of to-day because they are not very certain what sort of a change to-morrow might bring forth; but everywhere and at all times governments, and most peoples, do believe in the theory that those who have the power have also the right.

But the modern working-class movement—or at least some sections of it—are challenging the theory that the use of violence and force is right when used by a government, but is wrong when used by revolutionists. The growth of knowledge and understanding
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raises doubts, not merely as to whether the use of violence and force is wrong in connection with labour disputes, but as to whether the whole basis of society is not wrong, and whether the only revolution worth while is not one which shall proclaim to the world the sacredness of all life, and the blasphemy and sin against God of all forms of violence which have for their aim the destruction of men and women.

I often read denunciations of the 'Red Terror' in Russia. I read the same sort of stuff in 1871 about the French Communists. But even if all the ghastly horrors charged against them were true, I should contend that the Bolsheviks, and revolutionists generally, are angels of light compared with the civilised men who, in workshop and laboratory, scheme to produce poison gas and violet rays for choking and blinding hundreds of thousands of their fellow-men, and with those others who build large and small ships, submarines, aeroplanes, and all the other engines of terrorism.

The blockade of Central Europe and Russia is a blacker and more dastardly crime against God and humanity than anything which can be laid at the doors of revolutionists.

The teaching of the churches, who, through the ages, have invoked the God of Battles on the side of kings, emperors, and governments, is alone responsible for the fact that bloody revolutions take place. For do they not all teach that in a righteous cause man may murder his fellow men? Bishops and others endeavour to cover up this gross betrayal of their Master's teaching by talking of legal and civil authority. Russell Lowell has nailed down this commonplace lie:—
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Ef you take a sword and dror it,
And go stick a feller thru,
Guv’ment ain’t to answer for it—
God’ll send the bill to you.

These words are absolutely true. The bill for killing our fellow human beings comes to each succeeding generation. We can realise this when we consider the absolute failure of each one of us to find peace. We reap what others have sown, as others will reap what we are sowing to-day. This is an inexorable law of life from which there is no escape.

Therefore, if our intellectuals, who talk learnedly but ignorantely of the ignorance and stupidity of the workers, and those religious and moral teachers, who talk in an equally fatuous manner about the lack of morality and religion of the working class, desire to save the future from the horrors of bloody revolution, they must themselves give up reliance on forms and methods of violence.

It may be that before people could read it was possible to hoodwink and blind them to truth. To-day, after fifty years of elementary education, this is quite impossible. The British soldier who voluntarily enlisted to help destroy militarism and autocracy by the use of terrorism and violence will not now believe it is morally wrong to use the same weapons in order to destroy the capitalist system which dooms him and his dependants to the bondage of life-long wage-slavery, penury, and want. The chickens will come home to roost in this, as in everything else.

The promises made during the war are also making our people think of revolution. The other day girls —only a handful, it is true—were on the streets
demonstrating for the liberty to wear a trade union button which a certain firm forbade them to put on their frocks. Hundreds of thousands of men have discovered that their struggle in France was a struggle to enable them to have the freedom to walk about England unemployed and hungry. The ‘mountain top’ speeches of Mr Lloyd George have proved to be sheer bunkum and make-believe, as have the speeches of the religious leaders who incited the men to go out and fight in the name of the Lord, and promised England should never be the same again.

What is there to be done? In this book, my colleague, Gerald Gould, is showing us the problems and asking us to consider the way out. He has no faith in violence or terrorism—neither have I. Therefore, he writes all the time in a spirit of goodwill and respect for all men and women. No other man in the world of Labour has a better right to speak for the movement than he, for, in spite of having been an Oxford don, he does understand the common people, and writes as he thinks of them—as his fellow men and women. He somehow, with all his reading, has managed to do what so few university people succeed in doing: that is, see the workers as they really are—a struggling mass of well-meaning, hard-working people, who are plundered and robbed, not by morally superior people, but, instead, by those who are often their inferiors in every respect.

I owe a good deal to Gerald Gould, and so do all those who love and care for the Daily Herald. I am much older than he is. All the same, we have lived through the last eight years as brothers. In bright days and dark, he has been a comrade and friend on whose counsel and friendship I could always rely, and in days when the idealism of the Labour Movement