

THE LONG-SUFFERING MIDDLE CLASSES

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come the earth's greatest musicians: Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns, Debussy and many others one can name. So with the great novelists: Dostoevski, Balzac, Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith—down, in our own times, to the author of Babbitt. Count Leo Tolstoy is the only exception one can call to mind, and one can think of very few—none of the first rank—who emerged from the daily-wage working classes.

The stars of science have risen all but wholly from this class. And also the philosophers. Plato and Aristotle were "bourgeois men" in the terms of today. The Roman senators came from much the same classes as our own. Spencer, Bentham, Mill, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Montesquieu, Voltaire were middle-class men.

Thus, if we look over the whole course of history, asking ourselves who has produced our arts, our sciences, our philosophies, our social systems, our inventions—what class, if any, has created the world—the answer is: The wretched bourgeoisie.

Might we not draw from that fact certain deductions, from which to frame a social policy?

We might deduce that the best society is just that one in which the middle classes live. They do not inherit sufficient property to enable them to live in idleness. They enjoy a relatively high degree of education, and put great emphasis upon its importance, since it is through education alone that they can hope to improve their social and economic status. They do not live in the uncertainty of an hourly or daily wage, but can see ahead on annual earned incomes. In the professions, they are not organized into mass unions, but into professional guilds. They do not suffer from an inherent sense of social inferiority, but count themselves as the backbone of the nation. They are not spendthrift or ostentatious, taken as a whole. They have a strong feeling of independence, and expect rewards to be measured by capacity, diligence and superior imagination and skill.

They are often social snobs—but they are just as often social reformers. They have been the instigators of the reform movements throughout history—from the Gracchi of Rome to the New Dealers. When they are revolutionists, they usually dislike the revolutions made in their name, if they live to see them. I do not think Stalin would satisfy Karl Marx, and I am very sure that Hitler would raise the gorge of Nietzsche.

Should we not, therefore, try, in America, to create a society in which vast inherited wealth would not be possible, and in which destitution and insecurity of life would be abolished? Should it not be our aim to abolish the proletariat? And to abolish as well the oligarchies of vast wealth? Should we not remove forever the badge of social inferiority which is the worker's overall? Should we not recognize that whereas a level of social security is necessary for all, superior talent and diligence must always command superior reward? Should we not, in other words, seek to lift all workers into the middle classes—and depress all oligarchies into them too?

What's wrong with the middle classes? Only, I should think, that they bid fair to be ground beneath the upper and the nether millstones. And the record shows that if they are, the world will not be classless but tyrannous, not free but enslaved, and deprived of the very class which has been most fecund of creative imagination.

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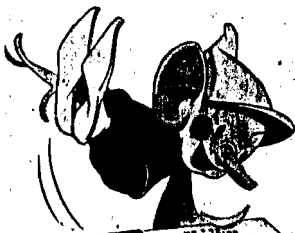
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