

**THE RISE OF THE  
AMERICAN  
PROLETARIAN**

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The rise of the American proletariat by Austin Lewis

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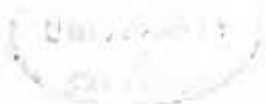
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BY  
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## PREFACE

The proletarian is a new factor in American political life. Up to within a very recent period his existence has been denied by statesmen and publicists. In the eyes of the ordinary respectable historian, this phenomenon of the growth of a class, in all respects similar to the European proletarian class, has been ignored. Even where the economic and political activities of this class have provoked a necessary and unavoidable interest, the peculiar aspect of these activities has either been uncomprehended or conveniently neglected. This ostrich tactic is not only foolish but dangerous as well. To ignore facts is the very worst way of meeting them. To ignore the fact of the American proletarian is mere stupidity.

The proletarian class has been born. It is already beginning to find itself. It will soon thoroughly understand the use of its organs. The economic and political efforts made by it will constitute the greater part of the history of the future in this and in all civilized lands.

The object of the following pages is to show briefly the causes of the origin of this proletarian class in the United States and to describe the mode in which it has made its existence manifest up to the present time. This naturally involves a critical estimate, from the proletarian point of view, of the environment in which it has developed. It is perhaps as difficult for the modern proletarian to arrive at an impartial estimate of the value of the capitalist system as it was for a Whig to correctly appreciate the feudal nobility. While antagonisms exist, hostile regards cannot be

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avoided, and to exhibit correctly the modern proletarian it is necessary, also, to make clear his attitude to the force with which he finds himself in antagonism. While the proletarian suffers the anguish of the conditions with which he is oppressed it would be very remarkable if he could view his antagonists with philosophic calm and front the battle with a mind clear of animosity. Desirable as such an attitude might be, it is, in the very nature of things, impossible. Therefore, in any discussion of the proletarian position, the proletarian psychology must also be taken into account.

The introductory chapters are intended as a brief resumé of industrial history. Their purpose is to point out to what extent the American industrialist, proletarian as well as captain of industry, has been indebted to preceding epochs of human history. Given the machine development of the eighteenth century and the factory system, the results have been unavoidable. The course of development in this country has presented no new aspects. It has been more rapid and more intense than in any other, except perhaps Japan, but the broad features of resemblance to that of other countries have been preserved. No form of government has presented any effective barrier to the advances of modern capitalism. Wherever the essential prerequisites of capitalistic growth have been found, the plant has flourished. The economic forces which have produced an ambitious and energetic proletariat in Russia, as far as the modern system has penetrated that country, have also produced a class conscious and ambitious proletariat in the United States. Political forms prove to be merely forms in face of the economic fact. The capitalist becomes master under any political system and President and King are equally his servants. Ouida somewhere remarks that a King is a

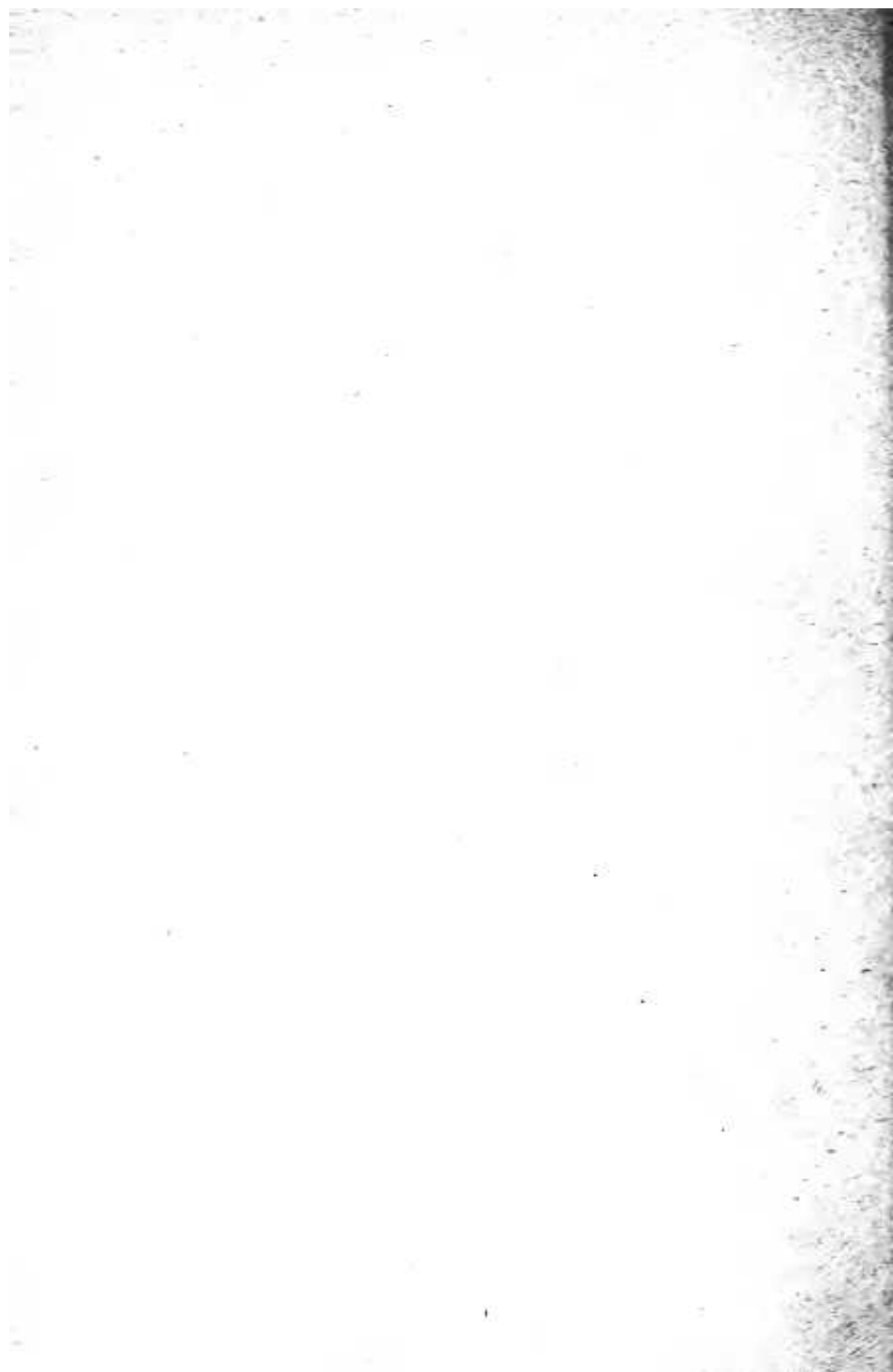


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fat man who bows well and a President is a fat man who bows badly; the essential point is that they each bow equally to the dominant capitalism. But where capitalism is dominant there the proletarian movement raises its head. In the hour of his triumph and amid the salutes to his victory, the capitalist, had he the powers of perception, might hear the tolling of his passing bell. The imperious demands which change makes upon life cannot be denied, and the young proletariat must in the course of time come to claim its own.

In the meantime, however, the proletariat has to grow up. To the fact of this growth the organs of public expression unanimously testify. With the recognition of this new development there is also mingled a fear—a fear, moreover, which is entirely unfounded. To the timorous and uninitiated bourgeois, which means to the popular journalist and the popular politician, this growth implies the destruction of what he is pleased to term civilization. According to all his gloomy vaticinations art and science, which the modern bourgeois claims to take under his protecting shield, are doomed to extinction at the hands of a brutal and violent working class. There need, however, be no alarm on this score. As Kautsky says: "It is not by the proletariat that modern civilization is threatened. It is those very communists who to-day constitute the safe refuge of arts and science for which they stand in the most decisive manner."

When the course of the proletarian is finally crowned with victory there is no reason to believe that the results of this step in human development will differ from those which have marked its predecessors. On the contrary, the triumph of the proletariat implies the triumph of Humanity over the tyranny of material things.



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