

# THE OLD RED FLAG



**Of Peace, Industry and  
Universal Brotherhood**

by J. W. SLAYTON

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## "THE OLD RED FLAG."

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Does the old red flag stand for violence—for bloodshed, for disorder and anarchy?

Why does the sight or mere mention of the "red flag" excite in some minds sentiments of repression and hate, closely approaching frenzy?

Why, on the other hand, do so many millions of people, the world over, almost reverence the red banner?

In order to answer these and many other questions relative to the workers' banner it will be necessary to trace its history. This will be done as briefly as possible, consistent with setting forth the more important facts which must be known to appreciate, even partially, the real worth of this old banner of labor and peace.

### Authority.

C. Osborn Ward will be relied on as authority, as it is found he quotes so many authors that we can safely depend on what he tells us.\*

### Class Colors.

The typical colors of ancient aristocracy were white, blue and purple, in banners, flags and clothing.

The colors used by the strictly laboring people, for similar purposes, were red, drab and murk.

White, in heathen mythology, was emblematic

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\*Ward was for years Librarian of the Congressional Library, Washington, D. C., and therefore had splendid opportunities to get facts, and he seems to have made the most of them.

ical of degree of caste and of "blue blood." It was the color befitting the priesthood and idleness. Often a beautiful blending of the blue accompanied the white. It was then taught and still believed that white is the color of the robes of angels.

### Soulless.

The working people in those days were not expected ever to become angels, for it was taught they had no souls; for instance, in Athens, when it had a population of 600,000 people, it was alleged there were only 40,000 souls—and we find these 40,000 owned about all the property of that city.

White, blue and purple are the colors which befit themselves to superstition and to property.

### Parasites.

Then (and now) the unsoiled (by honest toil), those who did no useful work, who ate up the products of labor, robed themselves in white, blue or purple, ascended chancel, pulpit, patriarchal seat or the throne, talked of their subjects and flaunted their exclusive colors in the faces of their victims.

White, blue and purple date from dim antiquity, and are self-suggestive as the antithesis of sweat and toil and grime.

They embellished and decked the bodies of the "washed," and could not go hand in hand with "creatures" smoked and smeared at the furnace and the anvil, or sweaty from toil in the field. Hence the contempt for labor.

The idea of Plato, copied from the pagan religion and which Christianity afterwards copied from him, under the name of Neo-

Platonism, was that of white robes, white wings and white banners—a mysterious power in the clouds, a home at Mt. Olympus, and in the vaulted dome of heaven, with myriads of slaves and menials in red, brown, dun and murk, who were to plod without souls, liberties, honors or rewards in the degrading service of keeping them white, clean-washed and fat.

Aristotle believed that labor was pure and worthy, yet he could see no way of ridding the world of slaves, except that he is credited with saying that machinery would ultimately furnish a basis of freedom. By thus postponing labor's emancipation to a dim, distant future, Aristotle did not incur the enmity of the master class of his day, as did the noble Socrates.

### Socrates.

Socrates was a member of a labor commune that carried the red flag and, of course, taught that labor was a virtue. He was, in many respects, the "wisest and best of men." He was accused of treason and of corrupting the youth. It can safely be said that the head and front of his treason and alleged corruption was his loyalty to labor. That, to be sure, was a serious crime in the eyes of the master class.

### War Flags.

According to Polybius, white was the color of the military banner of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

So long as the ancient military ranks remained "undefiled" by the presence of slaves and freedmen, or of persons of lowly condition, the banners and flags were white, azure and grey.

It must be remembered that in ancient days war was considered a noble calling, a "gentleman's profession," and it was a "crime" for a proletarian to bear arms.

Just here let us digress a moment.

The masters, then, at least had courage enough to fight. They don't have it now.

It is also a "crime" now in many states for the workers to "bear arms" except as thugs and hired assassins, in the employ of the masters of today, or in the army—and the latter is used only on behalf of the same class.

### Duplicity and Persecution.

We find that, curiously enough, the red flag was admitted into the Roman army as soon as the workingmen began to assume "political" importance, but it was not done to benefit the workers or out of respect for their flag.

The Roman generals, knowing how the workingmen loved the red banner, cunningly used it to further their own ends.

Multitudes of instances are on record showing that in some "surreptitious" manner the workers' banner, at the moment of onset of battle, was thrown into the enemy's lines, thereby enthusing (as was intended) those thus deceived, and with a reckless oblivion of danger, they rushed in desperate haste and determination to rescue from the polluted fingers of the barbarians their endeared and cherished flag.\*

At Rome the love of the red banner was

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\*In the past ages, and even now, the workers are taught to hate their alleged enemies. Just prior to the present European war, Germany taught her subjects that Russians were "barbarian hordes."

frequently turned to the profit of the rich. After the overthrow of the Roman kings (510 B. C.) consuls took their places, who began a series of almost unspeakable persecutions against the workers. The objects were: First, to disgrace the red flags, that is, make them seem odious, by imparting to them hateful and ferocious meanings; and, second, to crush the growing power of the unions

The patrician consuls fought the workingmen for years with such fury as to cause a vacancy in the government, that is, for a time neither the lords nor the people held the reins of power.

This happened under the leadership of Licinius Stolo, on the side of the plebians. He was also the author of the agrarian law, the most renowned statute of antiquity. The masters, however, soon got the upper hand again, and the persecution went on. Laws were passed to prevent any but the rich from wearing red. This was done, not because the rich had begun to love the red, but because they knew the poor hated the rich, and if they took the red to themselves the plebians might, in time, hate it. The aristocracy would inaugurate parades and have lictors carry bundles of rods, indicative of whips, with a red flag stuck in the end of the bundles, and an axe carried aloft as a warning that decapitation awaited a too rebellious worker or a disobedient slave.

These and every other means of suggestive repression and hate were employed for the purposes of showing contempt for the proletarians as a class, and for their red flag. Yet that flag would not down, as we now know.

## Its Long Struggle.

In order to fully appreciate the cause of the deep love of the workers for the red, it will be necessary to hark back to almost prehistoric times.

Its long and strictly proletarian association will, in part, account for the fact of its having successfully breasted the storms of time, adversity, persecution and aristocratic hate, and of its having descended to us from deep antiquity.

## Its Origin.

The sun worshipers were very ancient. They believed the sun was a living sentient being, the father of all life and the protector of man. They knew that all light and warmth came from him, and that it was his heat and light which caused their planting to grow and ripen. It was but natural that they should pay him homage for all these gifts. They, therefore, bowed in awe before this inspiring radiantly beautiful globe (personal deity as they thought him to be) as each morning he seemed to rise out of the ocean, and each evening seemingly retired to rest. They feared he might some time fail to reappear if they did not pay him due homage, and they were sure that would mean death.

To them his rays appeared red, so when they began to build temples in which to worship him they felt they should have some concrete visible emblem through which they could implore him when not in sight, and they employed red in painting his image, and later, in outdoor demonstrations in his honor, the red banner came.

Thus the red flag was not born in hate, but

in love and thankfulness, not as an emblem of death, but of life, and later became the emblem of labor, for it was seen that labor was also necessary to life.

Strange as it may seem, sun worship was found still to exist on the American continent after its "discovery." When the Christian robbers and murderers invaded Peru they found the people of the Incas, the most peaceful of men, worshiping the sun, and in their capital city's sun temple they had wrought a shining image of their sun god, in pure gold, worth \$15,000,000. This was, of course, stolen from them by those adventurers who, with the Bible in one hand and sword in the other, betrayed, robbed, murdered and then lied about them.

### **Aristocratic Deities.**

All students know there have been many deities and many forms of worship in times past, usually referred to now as "mythological." The laboring class in those days followed their masters in these matters as closely as they dared.

There were many aristocratic gods, such as Thor, Jupiter and the "Great Jove"—gods of war, of power, of opulence and of alleged superiority. Such gods were represented as wearing white, azure and purple, or a combination of these colors.

### **Deities in Red.**

This is significant for, as we shall see, all the deities of the laboring class of those times were clothed in red, and they were revered, without exception, as patrons of INDUSTRY.

Isis and Osiris, god and goddess in Egypt;

Ceres and Minerva, Athena, and Demeter, goddesses in Greece and Rome, Apollo and Bacchus were corresponding gods.

All of these and others of similar conception were always pictured in brilliant red. These deities were supposed to preside over agriculture and the trades, over fields of grain, gardens and orchards, and to protect women and men who worked in the arts and at trades. Their functions were those of insuring peace and protecting industry.

Therefore industry, peace and the red flag became an inseparable trinity.

#### Strange.

A thinker may wonder why the workers did not see that their deities did not protect them, as they remained slaves or menials. But is it not stranger still that the workers of today are as easily misled?

It is but natural, however, that we should find among those organizations which accepted those divinities as their protectors that they would adhere strictly to the colors they imagined their gods preferred.

Many inscriptions contain representations of the ancient red banner, so well known to have been carried in the innocent parades of the workers in Greece, Palestine, Asia-Minor and the islands, in nearly every town, large or small, in Italy, all along the coast of North Africa, and even at Carthage.

#### A Definition.

It might be well to define or explain the meaning of the word "flag." It is the root word for Flamma, Flammai, Flagma, Flagro,

Phlegma, Phego, signifying flame, a blazing fire, or red.

When one considers that the ancient sun worshipers evolved the flag long before Greece or Rome existed, these definitions are conclusively illuminating.

### **Hate and Prejudice.**

In addition to the things done to cast odious reflections on the workers' banner, efforts were also made to impart new definitions and hateful significant meanings thereto.

It was made to represent by "authority" **flagitum**, a shameful act; then **flagrum**, a whip; and when carried in the bundles of rods (whips) accompanied with the axe, these perverted meanings were sought to be conclusively established.

In spite of all of this and much more of similar nature, the organizations of labor would not, nor did not, give up their cherished banner.

As we here see, there was no secret of this hatred and contempt in ancient days.

The master class of today hates the red flag as much as it was hated then, and has equal contempt for the proletarian, but it is veiled and even denied.

### **More Reasons for Hate.**

The hatred of the masters for the red flag was increased because of the rapid growth in the number of labor organizations, all of which were based on the principles the red flag had come to symbolize. Then, by the further fact that in Greece and Rome, many of these organizations grew strong, and threatened to and in many cases did become powerful political factors. This latter fact was, of course, the

greatest crime against the autocracy of ownership, the military and established political powers.

### Working Class Colors.

Not only were the emblems, banners and flags of the working class red, as we have seen, but they wore red from choice, and dull-hued colors in clothing from necessity.

Dancing girls nearly always danced in brilliant red, to the music of flute players dressed in the same color.

As to the trades, which concerns us deeply, we find that the shoemakers, saddlers, stone cutters and polishers, carpenters, carders, weavers, dyers, ironworkers, lacemakers, painters, brass workers, glass workers, and nearly every other trade (including servants) carried the red flag at the head of separate or joint trade processions. They also had red banners on the walls of their meeting places or shops, as a central charter of principles, as well as having them posted, when possible, over their portals outside as an invitation to passing proletarians. Nothing could be more suggestive than this of its peaceful character and of its relation to industry.

Finally it was discovered that the blood of all men was red. This may have been a surprise, for the phrase, "blue-blooded aristocracy" was at least partially accepted by many, but when it was found that the blood of all men was exactly alike, the red flag took on a new aspect and became the symbol of the **Brotherhood of Man**, and, as such, it is now revered by millions of men and women in every "civilized" nation on earth.

## Christians.

It may surprise many to know that the early Christians adopted the red banner—yet there should be no surprise in this, for they were of the despised working class, nearly all of whom belonged to some organization of labor, whose banner was red.

One banner of that period was flaming red, without spot or blemish of any other color except in the center, where stood the Virgin Mary, dressed in silver gray, holding in her arms the naked infant.

But as soon as priest power began to rear its head the old white, purple and blue largely returned.

After Constantine annexed himself to Christianity and then annexed Christianity to the state, and he became the state, nothing else could have been expected.

We still sometimes hear of the "blood-red banner" of Christ. An ancient Christian hymn contained these lines:

"His blood-red banner streams afar,  
Who follows in His train?"

How can you, who now call yourselves Christians, join hands with the class whose hate and greed causes them to crucify labor now, as the same class in the olden days crucified the early Christians?

The class is the same, the objects similar—robbery of labor, and YOU, who pretend to believe in the "atoning blood of Christ," and His "blood-red banner," hate the blood-red banner of labor and peace. This, too, in spite

of the fact that it was YOUR banner while the Church was composed only of the poor and lowly.

### Coming Our Way.

It will be unnecessary to give in detail the history of this glorious banner in Italy, Africa (Egypt), Turkey, Asia, Morocco, Spain Algiers and Peru. The student of history will know that these countries (except Peru) were dominated at some time by Greece or Rome. The red flags always went with the workers from these countries.

The Romans carried the red flag into Britain, and there it has played its age-long part among the workers.

Now, let us come "home," where a surprise awaits most of us.

The first flags of the Colonies were red. Those of Massachusetts (the cradle of liberty) were "flaming red," and there is little doubt that the same is true of some of the other colonies, for we find that at the outbreak of "hostilities" the flag which floated over the "immortal" Washington was red.

It was the flag of Lexington, of Ticonderoga and of Putnam at Bunker Hill.

It is well known that Pulaski organized what became known as Pulaski's Legion. He was presented with a banner "formed of crimson silk." It contained two mottoes, and on one side "the all-seeing eye, surrounded by thirteen stars." It remained the banner of the Legion to the end of the Revolution. "After having waved over the greater part of the old thirteen states, it was returned to Baltimore, there to

be permanently enshrined.”\* That “banner” is now in the possession of the Maryland Historical Association.\*\*

Longfellow dedicated a poem to it, in which these words occur:

“Take this flag, and if e'er  
Thou shouldst press the soldiers's bier,  
To the tread of mournful feet,  
Then this crimson flag shall be  
Martial cloak and shroud for thee.”

It may seem as though the red flag had lost its peaceful character, now that it was being voluntarily carried in war, but it must be remembered that it was not being carried by an invading, but by a defending army. It was not being used to destroy liberty, but in resisting tyranny and, hence, it had not degenerated, but it was inspiring noble sentiments in men, in this country, before “Betsy Ross” evolved the Stars and Stripes.

It may be possible that the change was made not by the mass, but by a few, partly for the reason that the red flag was too symbolical of genuine democracy.

Be that as it may, one thing is sure, and that is the colors in the Stars and Stripes represent classes, and but one stripe, the red, represents the laboring class.

Carnegie must have known this, for he said in his “Triumphal Democracy” that Ceres should have been declared “the tutelary patroness of America.”

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\*North American Review, Vol. 20, page 390.

\*\*History of Baltimore City and County.

## Present Hate.

With this history in view, or accessible to all who wish it, what must be thought of those who now denounce and lie about this banner of peace?

What must be thought of legislators who have passed or are trying to pass state laws making it a "legal" crime to carry in public this flag of labor?

If they do not know its history, their ignorance is none the less mischievous, and if they do, their prejudice is infamous.

## "International."

Without casting any reflections on any national flag, but for the purpose of illustrating the idea, we wish to ask: What does the green flag of Ireland signify to the Germans, or what do the Irish care for the German banner, or either of them for the flags of Spain, Italy, Turkey, South America, France, China, Japan; or, in short, what do the people of any one nation care for the flag of any other?

It is impossible to have a united people under any national flag. The waving of a national flag, accompanied with the usual lying patriotic gush, fans into flame the worst passions of men, excites national hatred, produces "insults" to flags, turns fruitful fields into shambles, and men who should be brothers into legalized butchers.

The uniquely saving distinction of the red flag is that it is not national, but international. It is common to all nations. It has no national character, but claims the world as its country, the laboring class as its adherents; symbolizes the brotherhood of man as its historic mission

and emphasizes the importance and divinity of labor.

### **The Black Flag.**

The real flag of capitalism is black, but the capitalists lack the courage to display it. They commit their piracy of labor and corruption of the nation under the folds of the "Stars and Stripes."

They talk of "law and order" while stealing the nation and creating disorder.

While mouthing patriotism, they are the real traitors.

They preach to the workers about "our country," when they know the working class don't even own a job.

### **Socialism.**

The red flag has stood the test of time and hate, and is destined to float over a united working class with just one word on it as a fitting corollary of its long and splendid service. That word is **Socialism**.

The flag is the symbol, that word the substance of the brotherhood of man, the solidarity of labor, the inauguration of the co-operative commonwealth, and the emancipation of man, woman and child.

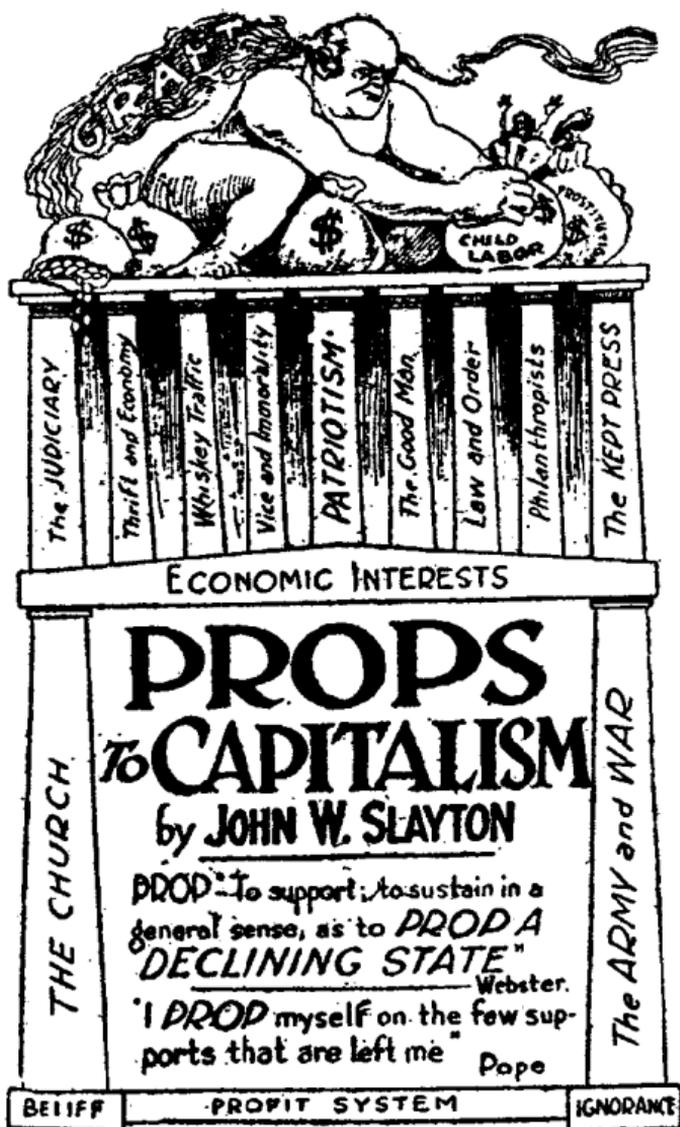
J. W. SLAYTON.

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### **Note.**

The master class seems to have always feared that the workers would some day wake up to the importance of political action.

It seems that the laborers were persecuted and treated with contempt, partly to keep them in subjection, and to make them believe they



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were not intended by the gods to take part in such privileged matters as government.

Even now some of our "divinely inspired" (?) ministers tell us to be content in the lot in which "God has seen fit to place us."

In past days, "whenever the workers ventured to consider and act on the subject of politics which, of all subjects, was (and still is) the most necessary to their welfare," hate and repressive persecutions were redoubled in relentless fury.

The capitalist class of our day know that they must control the government or lose their privilege of robbing the working class.

The working class is silly enough still to give its consent, each election day, for the robbery to go on.

When the workers wake up—become conscious of their rights and power—they will take possession of the political powers, and govern themselves.

Our strongest and most important field of action today is the political. Let us get into it with all our might.

The earth belongs to those who have sense enough to use the best means of getting and keeping it.

Political Power is the best world-getting tool ever evolved by man. When the working class uses it intelligently they will gain the world and lose their chains.

J. W. S.

## THE FLAG OF LABOR.

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**“The flag that stands for labor  
On ev’ry land or sea,  
Where wage slaves band together  
And struggle to be free.  
The flag that’s bound to conquer,  
That never will be furled  
Till labor gains its rightful place  
As master of the world.”**

Prices of “The Red Flag”: 1 to 10 copies, 5 cents each; 100 copies, \$2.50. Larger quantities on application. Cash with order. Charges prepaid on all my booklets.

**J. W. SLAYTON,**

**Lelia Street, Pittsburgh, Pa.**

