

The Communists and "Americanism"

by Bertram D. Wolfe

"Sympathizer's" interesting letter, published in our last issue, reveals two outstanding characteristics of its author: 1) sincere sympathy with Communism and hatred of the decaying capitalist system, and 2) a lack of comprehension of the revolutionary role of the proletariat.

"Sympathizer" is keenly sensitive to the widespread misery of war, unemployment and parasitic exploitation, the cancerous growth of racketeering, gangsterism and corruption, that are the by-products of the final stage of capitalism. But he (or she) for the letter is anonymous has apparently only recently become aware of the need of revolutionary change and is not yet conscious of the forces which are developing in present day society to bring about that change. The writer's development toward Communism may stop there, in which case he will nourish all sorts of utopian schemes for revolutions without the masses, behind the back of the masses, by sudden and fantastic *coups d'état*—and despairing of them, may sooner or later land in the camp of Fascism or cynical conservatism. Or else, "Sympathizer" will develop from an awareness of the awakens of the revolutionary forces developing within it—the proletariat and its allies, the poor farmers, the colonial peoples and revolutionized sections of the petty-bourgeoisie and "intelligentsia." Then "Sympathizer" will cease believing that the masses can be perpetually led by the nose and will cease hoping merely that they should be led by the nose by "good people" (Communists) and not "bad people" (capitalists), and he will throw in his lot with the Communists and join with them in the by-no-means easy task of freeing working-class thought and feeling from bourgeois influence and organizing the large collective weapons of the working class, their party and unions and other organizations, into an irresistible force for the defeating of the few by the many and the building of a decent human society in the interest of all.

The Question Of The Flag

The question of the flag is, of course, a question of symbols. But the significance of symbols may be viewed deeply or superficially. Thus when the writer declares:

"Russia is organized under the red flag. But Communism would still be Communism if the flag were green or yellow." We must answer: Yes the color is immaterial, but Communism would not be Communism if the flag were national in place of international. And red happens to have become, historically, the symbol of international solidarity. Any other color might have become, but no other color has become the symbol of internationalism. And one color combination could certainly never have become the symbol of internationalism in Russia—the white, blue and red banner of Czarism!

Americans Are No Exceptions

But—objects the writer—the American masses are blindly attached to the Stars and Stripes. So were the Russian masses blindly attached to the "little father" and the church and the flag—until it came to symbolize in their minds all the things they hated! oppression, tyranny, starvation, imperialism, war. When they learned to hate those things, they learned to hate their symbols, the very symbols they had revered so blindly. That was one of the signs of the revolutionization of the masses. Then they rallied to other symbols because they were rallying to other things. The American masses still believe in the symbol because they do not yet sufficiently disbelieve in the things for which it stands.

Whose Revolution Is It?

So much for the superficial question of symbols. But "Sympathizer" has raised, somewhat vaguely to be sure, a far deeper question. And in that deeper question "Sympathizer" is profoundly right. It is the question: which he synthesizes in the proposed slogan "Recapture our country," and in the proposal to claim for the modern revolutionary movement (Communism) the best traditions of earlier revolutionary America, the traditions of Jefferson and Patrick Henry and Lincoln, and—we might add—of Samuel Adams and Thomas Paine, of Bacon, Leisler and Daniel Shays, of Nat Turner and John Brown and Wendell Phillips—and of many more as well (Tho we cannot follow "Sympathizer" when he admits Roosevelt or Henry Clay).

The Bill of Rights forced into a reactionary constitution by vigilant revolutionaries today belongs to us. The master class honors that Bill of Rights only by its breach and not by its observance. That immortal section of the Declaration of Independence which proclaims the right of the people to "alter or abolish" any government which does not serve their interests, is also part of our heritage. Communists are arrested for asserting that right today. Nor does it help them to show that they are quoting the "immortal" document.

A Communist speaker in Pittsburgh who tried to read that section of the Declaration of Independence was arrested. "I didn't write that," he protested, "Thomas Jefferson wrote it." "Well, I'll pull you in first," answered the cop, "and then I'll go back and get this here guy Jefferson."

The master class is arresting the revolutionists of 1776 and rejecting their heritage. We claim the heritage they reject. We dispute with them for this heritage. We say to the Tory "Daughters of the American Revolution" and the Tory Mellons and Hoovers: "We are definitely more consistent and truer guardians of the American heritage than you."

Build On The Inheritance

But we are no "back-to-1776-ers." We propose to build upon and enlarge the inheritance. We realize its limitations, the incompleteness, the limited class character of the heritage. We insist, as Lenin did of the heritage from the Russian Narodniki (Populists): "To keep the inheritance by no means signifies that one must limit himself to what he has inherited."

Back to 1776? "Back to nothing," we answer. "We use the past to build the future, not to block the present. Forward to Communism . . ."

The Question Of Loyalty

To American capitalism and imperialism we are disloyal. To the interests of the great mass of American workers and toiling farmers we are unwaveringly loyal. We do not say: "Our country right or wrong." On the contrary, so long as we find anything wrong in "our" country we will fight like hell to set it right. And if I put the "our" in quotation marks it is because we do not own the country altho we have built it. In that sense, it is one of the aims of our movement to make the country "ours" without the quotation marks.

So intense is this feeling of loyalty to the real America, the toiling exploited, producing masses, that, in peace and in war, our first care is to defeat "our own" master class, for we know that with its defeat will come the defeat of the most powerful bulwark of reaction in all the world.

The "National" Pride of the Communists

We Communists are not devoid of

"national" pride. But we are generally proud of the things of which the master class is ashamed and ashamed of the things of which they are proud. We are proud of the revolutionary traditions of Thomas Jefferson ("The tree of liberty must be fertilized with the blood of tyrants!"), proud of the influence of the Declaration of Independence on the French Revolution, proud of the first American flag of flaming crimson bearing the revolutionary device: "Don't Tread On Me." We are proud of the generous purpose of transcendentalism and its noble, if misguided utopianism, of the invincible courage of the abolitionists and their burning hatred of slavery, of the broad equalitarianism of Whitman, the anti-plutocratic spirit of populism and the unswerving opposition of the "muckrakers" to the gigantic trusts. We are proud, too, of the fruitful genius and plenty-producing marvels of American technical achievement.

Therefore do we hate with a deep hatred all that is slavish and corrupt in our national life, all the "hoggish, cheating and bedbug qualities," as Walt Whitman called them, in the past and present of America. Therefore do we hate the abuse of the machine for the enslavement of man in place of his emancipation. Therefore do we scorn to see the United States appear before the world as the jailer of Latin America, as the pawnbroker, Uncle Shylock, as the wielder of the big stick, as the symbol of world reaction.

The real interests of our people coincide with the interests of the toilers and oppressed thruout the world. The highest nationalism today is at the same time internationalism. And in this sense too are we profoundly "national." We are determined to do our duty above all in "our own" country, to defeat "our own" master class, and we rejoice to know that in defeating them, we defeat the most powerful and most oppressive master class of all and thereby America's working class makes a tremendous contribution to the freedom of all peoples thruout the world.

Pioneers Of The New World

A MESSAGE TO AMERICAN ENGINEERS

by Nikolai Bukharin

We publish below the message of Nikolai Bukharin, the famous Marxist theoretician and Communist leader, to the American engineers and technicians working in the Soviet Union on the occasion of the fourteenth anniversary of the October Revolution. The message originally appeared in the Moscow News of November 6, 1931.

You are now working in a country which represents a gigantic laboratory. You see around you new forms of construction and production being extended on an unprecedented scale; a whirl of new ideas, the beginnings of a new culture. And in the midst of this raging current, underground rocks from our historic past, remnants of poverty and illiteracy are still to be found.

In this combination of the most varied elements, in the great mosaic of our social life, there are, however, fundamental and decisive tendencies which are due to the fact that we are building a Socialist society, that we are constructing a planned economy, that we have the support of millions, that we display an unprecedented energy and stubbornness in the attainment of the aims to which we have set ourselves.

You are people from another social world, with other habits of life. Yet you have come to the Soviet Union.

Many years ago when Great Britain's transatlantic colony—the future republic of the Stars and Stripes—began to establish itself, there was a flow of pioneers, of energetic builders, of people who were unfettered by ancient tradition, daring in their actions and heedless of obstacles. Old Europe looked upon these people with suspicion; the aristocracy despised them. But this disregard for ancient tradition, this pioneering work, this new construction in a new land, led to results that are now obvious to all.

The twentieth century marked a still greater break. The Soviet Union, arising out of the ruins of a gigantic semi-Asiatic despotism, has become a new land in the midst of the capitalist world. Here too we have a new scale of measurement, new qualities and quantities, the labor of pioneers. But the uprooting of the old social basis is incomparably deeper, the break with the traditions of the past is more fundamental. There has been a much more radical change in social life and the leap to a new technical basis for society is much greater. The U.S.S.R. represents the first working class revolution, which has opened up gigantic perspectives for construction.

The whole of the old world, which has been given the lie by this revolution, looks upon it with disfavor. This is as natural as was, in its time, the hatred of the titled aristocracy towards the young American republic

The course of history, however, cannot be set back and it should be the aim of all thoughtful people to understand what is happening.

I am of the opinion that every engineer really worth his salt who grasps what is taking place cannot but be attracted by the gigantic scale of our construction. Transient difficulties, from minor material discomforts down to misunderstandings arising out of failure to comprehend the language or because of bureaucratic red tape, are but trifles in comparison with the tremendous changes that are taking place. These difficulties are but chips falling from a granite rock; they are but waste products in a gigantic production process.

You must understand this: you must feel this. To understand this you need to have a cool head, a wide horizon, the ability for unbiased analysis and for participation in the social life around you. To feel this you need to love and value labor, to be freed from old ideas, to be attracted by the novel and to desire to go forward.

PITTSBURGH FORUM HITS "AGE" BAN

The following resolution on the Revolutionary Age case was passed by the Pittsburgh Forum. All other labor organizations and organizations committed to a free press are urged to do the same.

WHEREAS the Supreme Court has denied the appeal of the Revolutionary Age against the decision of the United States District Court and the United States Court of Appeals, sustaining the action of the Postmaster of New York in refusing second class mailing rights to this paper; and

WHEREAS this action of the Post Office Department against the Revolutionary Age took place under power of the war time espionage Act still in force; and

WHEREAS this action of the Post Office Department against the Revolutionary Age and the actions of the United States District Court and the higher courts came as a result of the militant stand the Revolutionary Age has taken since its establishment, in the defense of the cause of labor; and

WHEREAS this decision of the Supreme Court, making it possible for the Post Office authorities to refuse second class mailing rights to, and thereby virtually to suppress, any paper whose contents may be objectionable to it, constitutes a serious menace to the entire labor movement and especially to the labor press;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this conference goes on record:

1. To protest against the action