

Should Communists Participate in Reactionary Unions?

By N. Lenin.

(Concluded)

The struggle with the "labor aristocracy" we carry on in the name of the working masses and for the purpose of winning them over to our side. This struggle with the social-chauvinist and opportunist leaders must be carried on in order to attract the working class to us. It would be sheer folly to ignore this most elementary and self-evident truth. And it is precisely this folly that is being committed by the "left" German Communists, who, because of the reactionary and counter-revolutionary character of the leaders of the trade unions, jump at conclusions and withdraw from the unions, refusing to work within them; evolving new and fantastic forms of labor organizations. In persisting in this unpardonable folly, the communists are rendering the greatest service to the bourgeoisie. For the Menshevik, the social-chauvinist and Kautskian leaders of the trade unions are nothing less than agents of the capitalists within the working class movement, (just as we have always said of our own Mensheviks) or, in the beautiful and profoundly truthful expression used by DeLeon, in America, "the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class".

To refuse to take part in the reactionary trade unions means to abandon the undeveloped or backward masses to tender mercies of the reactionary leaders, the agents of the bourgeoisie, and to the "aristocrats of labor", the capitalist minded workers. (See a letter written by Engels to Marx in 1852, referring to the English workers).

The silly "theory" of non-participation in the reactionary trade unions discloses in a most striking manner the superficial attitude of the "left" communists toward the question of reaching and influencing the masses. Their ravings about the "masses" become abusive and worthless.

In order to be in a position to assist the masses, and win their sympathy, good-will, and active support, we must fear neither insults, hardships, or persecution at the hands of the reactionary leaders, who being social-patriots, are in most cases directly or indirectly connected with the capitalist government and the police powers of the state. IT IS INCUMBENT UPON US TO WORK WHERE THE MASSES ARE!

We must school ourselves to make any sacrifices, to be able to overcome the greatest obstacles, in order to carry on, systematically, and with indomitable determination, our propaganda and agitation in all these unions, societies, etc., even though they are the most frankly reactionary, provided always that they are composed of proletarian or semi-proletarian working masses. The trade unions and workers' co-operatives (the latter only to a certain extent) are just the kind of organizations which take in the working masses. According to data cited in a Swedish newspaper, of March 10, 1919, the membership of the British trade unions increased from 5.5 million in 1917, to 6.5 million in 1918, a 19 per cent increase. At the end of 1919 this figure jumped to 7.5 million. I do not happen to have at hand corresponding figures for France or Germany, but it is incontestable that the membership of the trade unions in these countries has also increased enormously.

These figures and facts bear out with the utmost clarity that which is being indicated by a thousand other manifestations, viz; the growth of consciousness and the intense desire for unity and organization among the proletarian masses and the most backward elements of the workers. For the first time millions of workers in England, France, and Germany, are passing from a condition under which there was an utter lack of organization of any kind, to the elementary (and for those who are still imbued with bourgeois-democratic prejudices), the most accessible, lowest, and simplest form of organization, namely; the trade unions. The revolutionary, but inconsistent, left communists stand alongside of this phenomenon shouting to the masses, at the same time refusing to work within the trade union, refusing under the pretence that these unions are reactionary; while at the same time organizing or inventing brand-new, simon-pure organizations, which, while free from bourgeois-democratic prejudices, are still burdened with the sins of trade and craft

exclusiveness. The Workers' Union will be broad(?) they say, and will admit everybody only upon ONE condition, i. e. the recognition of the Soviet System and the Dictatorship. Greater foolhardiness, greater detriment of the proletarian revolution, than this sort of activity on the part of the left communists of Germany is impossible to conceive. If we, in Russia, after two and one-half years of unparalleled victories over the Russian bourgeoisie and those of the Entente, should now stipulate as a condition for admission to the trade unions, the recognition of the Dictatorship, we would be committing a blunder and impair our influence with the masses and thereby play into the hands of the Menshevik. For the real task of the Communists is to be able to convince the most backward masses, to work among them, and not to isolate ourselves from them by fanciful and childish "left" slogans.

Gompers, Henderson, Johaux, Legien, are without doubt, grateful to these left revolutionaries, who, like the German "opposition on principle" (save as from such principles!) or like some revolutionists in France, or the American Industrial Workers of the World, preach withdrawing from the reactionary trade unions, refusing to work within them.

There is no doubt but that the opportunist leaders of the unions will resort to all the dirty tricks of bourgeois diplomacy, invoking the help of the capitalist governments, priests, police, judges, etc., in order to prevent the communists from penetrating into the trade unions, to force them out of the unions, to make their work within the unions as dangerous as possible, aiding the police to persecute and run them down. But we must be able to withstand all that, to be ready for any and every sacrifice, and even if necessary, to practice trickery, to employ cunning, and to resort to illegal methods, to sometimes even overlook or conceal the truth,—all for the sake of penetrating into the trade-unions, to stay there and by every and all means carry on the work of COMMUNISM.

Under the Czars regime, prior to 1915, we had no legal status, but when Zubatov, of the Russian secret service police, undertook to organize the "Black Hundred Labor Assemblies" and Labor Societies for the purpose of trapping the revolutionists and combatting them, we dispatched to these meetings and organizations, some of our best men, who got in touch with the masses and contrived to carry on a campaign of agitation within these organizations, with the result that we succeeded in turning the masses away from the influences of the Zubatovists.

Gompers, Henderson, Johaux, Legien, and Co. are nothing but "Zubatovs" who are distinguished from the Russian Zubatov by their modish dress, their cultural polish, and by their more refined and democratically developed technique, in carrying out their infamous policy.

It is certainly much more difficult to accomplish the kind of work carried on in Russia, by the Communists, in the countries of Western Europe and America, because the workers are so thoroughly permeated with legalistic, constitutional, bourgeois-democratic prejudices. Nevertheless this kind of work not only can be done, but must be done, and done systematically.

The Executive Committee of the Third International, should, in my opinion, straightway condemn, and recommend that the Third International should issue a thesis exposing in detail the stupidity of such tactics, as being inimical to the best interests of the proletarian revolution, and particularly denounce the line of conduct followed by the Dutch "Tribunists" who directly or indirectly, openly or covertly, completely or partially, support this misguided policy.

The Third (Communist) International must repudiate the tactics of the Second International and settle burning questions, not in an ambiguous way but directly and clearly, hitting straight from the shoulder.

We told the German Independents (Independent Socialist Party) the whole truth, everything that we thought about them. We must tell the whole truth to the "left" Communists as well, and right to their faces.

THREE YEARS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

(Continued from Page 1)

SUCH A CAPITALIST WAR. IF THEY CONSCRIPT YOU LEARN HOW TO TURN YOUR GUNS AGAINST YOUR OPPRESSORS IN YOUR OWN COUNTRY!

YOU WORKERS ARE THE BACKBONE OF SOCIETY. CIVILIZATION WOULD GO CRASHING TO DOOM WITHOUT YOUR NECESSARY LABOR WHICH FEEDS, CLOTHES AND SHELTERS THE WORLD. YOU ARE MANY, YOU HAVE THE POWER TO ABOLISH THIS DAMNABLE SYSTEM WHENEVER YOU ARE PREPARED AND ORGANIZED TO DO IT. YOUR ENEMIES—THE CAPITALISTS—ARE FEW, YET THEY KNOW HOW TO KEEP YOU IN SUBJECTION AND SLAVERY. THEY HAVE THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH GIVES THEM CONTROL OF THE ARMY, THE NAVY, THE POLICE, THE COURTS, THE PRESS, THE CHURCH, ETC. AND THUS THEY KEEP YOU IN IGNORANCE DIVIDED AGAINST YOURSELVES, INCAPABLE OF TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION—AND WHENEVER NECESSARY THEY CALL OUT THE ARMED FORCES OF THE STATE TO HOLD YOU DOWN!

THE CAPITALISTS HAVE BUILT UP A POWERFUL MACHINE—THE STATE—BY MEANS OF WHICH THEY ARE ABLE TO RETAIN THEIR GRIP AS THE RULING CLASS IN SPITE OF THEIR NUMERICAL INFERIORITY. DON'T YOU SEE THAT THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS MACHINE AND ESTABLISHING YOUR OWN MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT THAT WILL BE ABLE TO EXPROPRIATE THE CAPITALIST CLASS, PUT DOWN COUNTER-REVOLUTION AND TURN THE INDUSTRIES OVER TO THE WORKERS. THAT IS WHAT THE THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS OF RUSSIA HAVE DONE. THIS WORKERS' STATE THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT IN THE FORM OF A SOVIET GOVERNMENT—IS NOT LIKE THE CAPITALIST STATE. IT IS NOT INTENDED TO REMAIN FOREVER. IT IS ONLY TEMPORARY DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD FROM CAPITALISM TO COMMUNISM. AFTER THE CAPITALISTS HAVE BEEN EXPROPRIATED, AFTER ALL CLASSES HAVE BEEN ABOLISHED, AFTER ALL PROPERTY HAS BECOME THE PROPERTY OF ALL THE WORKERS IN COMMON—THE WORKERS STATE WILL DISAPPEAR BECAUSE IT WILL HAVE NO COERCIVE FUNCTIONS TO PERFORM.

AND IN ITS PLACE WILL APPEAR THE COMMUNIST SOCIETY—THE FREE ASSOCIATION OF ALL MANKIND IN THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH.

THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF SOVIET RUSSIA—OF THE FREE WORKERS AND PEASANTS OF THE RUSSIAN SOVIET REPUBLIC—TO THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD!

THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AMERICA!

THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF THE THIRD (COMMUNIST) INTERNATIONAL—THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAN VANGUARD OF THE WORLD!

THEN RALLY ROUND THE REVOLUTIONARY BANNER OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AMERICA FOR THE COMING SOCIAL REVOLUTION FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THE CAPITALIST GOVERNMENT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOVIET GOVERNMENT OF AMERICA THAT WILL JOIN HANDS WITH SOVIET RUSSIA FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD FROM WAGE-SLAVERY AND CAPITALISM!

HAIL TO SOVIET RUSSIA!
LONG LIVE COMMUNISM!