

Social Democratic Betrayal**Answer to a Socialist Worker**

We are in receipt of a letter from H. Engelman, a socialist worker in which he takes issue with our bitterness of attack on socialists in general and Norman Thomas, American S.P. leader in particular. The glittering theory of "social fascism" conjured up by the present Comintern regime lumps together the social-democratic officialdom and rank and file in the same fascist pot. It is a theory we decidedly repudiate. We are in a period not of direct revolutionary crisis when arguments must mount the barricades but of preparing the forces of a revolutionary class movement. Accordingly we do not believe that the best way of convincing our correspondent is by cracking his skull open, say with a blackjack. We recall a speech of Zinoviev's when still an authority in which he sharply condemned the tactics of raising a physical barrier between Communist and social democratic workers. That speech published in the theoretical organ of the International retains all its validity.

"I am a socialist," the letter runs, "because I do not believe in acquiring anything through violence and bloodshed. I am a true follower of Debs. Of course our Party is infected by opportunists and traitors. Every party has them. Even the Communist Party..." And further on he adds, "while I agree with your denunciations, I fail to comprehend your conclusions. You predict that if Norman Thomas was in MacDonald's position he would do the same in regards to our colonial policy. You know this is a very dangerous argument, because the same thing can be said of you or anyone else. What is there to assure us that if Trotsky replaces Stalin the former will adhere to Leninist principles... Suppose I grant the indictment of European socialists. Are they the only workers' movement that is misleading the workers? According to yourself, Stalin is doing the same. Does that mean the Communists are unworthy of workers' support? No, you will have betrayals in any movement, no matter what color it is... You cannot indict a whole movement..."

Indictment of Social Democracy

But of course you can indict a whole movement in the sense that we indict the "social democracy", and the author of the letter would have no difficulty in understanding us if his philosophical point of departure were historical materialism instead of a vague idealism and his argumentation grounded in the realities of the class struggle instead of the sterility of social pacifism. There are well-intentioned, honest, "sincere" and "cultured" people on all sides. But the essence of the matter is the class struggle which rages throughout the capitalist world between those who live by the extraction of rent, interest and profit, determined to maintain their privileges and perquisites either by "democratic" or fascist means and the class subjected to exploitation. Leaders, parties and movements in the social struggle, their program, and their deeds are motivated by class interests.

When we indict the Social Democracy we indict the petty-bourgeois bureaucracy which is in control of the masses, and history has made it possible to predict the course of that bureaucracy with tolerable accuracy. The program of the social democracy is a program of class collaboration, of constitutionalism, of parliamentarism, of legislative reformism in accordance with the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie. It follows inevitably that the socialist leaders will oppose the developing mass action of the workers at every turn in the struggle against Capital, from choking off strikes in the interests of "conciliatory methods" to forcefully resisting the proletarian revolution. In logical accordance with their class interests the socialists practise coalition government with the bourgeoisie and reject the idea of the proletarian dictatorship. It follows inevitably that social reformism and opportunism (class collaboration on the basis of "democracy" in time of peace) will be translated into social imperialism and patriotism ("National Defense") in time of war.

A Record of Betrayals

The records of the past few decades bear this out in full. You cannot serve both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat with-

out committing social treachery. The historic function of the social democracy, ever since its break with Marxism, has been that of an agency of the bourgeoisie inside the working class movement, and the conscious recognition of this fact by the individual social democratic leaders is not necessary to make it true. The march of events speaks for itself. For years before the world war, the Left inside the Second International warned against the ominous consequences of socialist opportunism, of ministerialism, of parliamentary cretinism. The collapse of the International on the declaration of war like a pack of cards was a complete vindication of the Left struggle against both the Right wing and the centrists.

Can it be gainsaid that the German Social Democracy ruined the prospects of the Revolution of 1918 for the working class? With every nerve they consciously worked for the restoration of German capitalism. They deluded the workers with paper plans of socialization. They called in the white guard generals to help crush the revolutionary Spartacist movement with fire and sword. They liquidated the Soviet movement in favor of the bourgeois Assembly in Weimar. They came to the rescue of the capitalists in every subsequent crisis, and notably in 1923. They

The Suicide of Vladimir Mayakovsky

The most celebrated of the contemporary Russian poets, the futurist Mayakovsky shot himself in the heart on April 14th in Moscow. He was for years at the height of renown and in the limelight. Indefatigably he spread in the gazettes a socialist optimism of the most orthodox kind. His evolution was still more marked in this direction lately. Only a few weeks ago he gave his resounding adherence to the Society of Proletarian Writers of Moscow. His unexpected end is almost inexplicable.

This audacious spirit, this enemy of romanticism and sentimentality wrote in a final note addressed "to all" that suicide was certainly not a solution, but there was no other way out for him.

He made some reference to affairs of the heart that were thwarted by the conditions of life. After which the publicist Koltsov who knows how to make fun of a reader compares in the *Literary Gazette* the "accident" that happened to Mayakovsky with the accident to Shelley who was drowned while canoeing, and Verhaeren who was run over by a train. One can obviously not make these comparisons without a cultivated sense of humor. At the same time there was a good deal of talk of illness. But neither affairs of the heart, nor even serious illness can entirely explain the end of such a man.

This death supervened after eighteen months of heavy literary confusion (not a production, not a single one during this whole lapse of time) but frenzied campaigns against Tom, Dick and Harry, major and minor excommunications, incessant recognition of mistakes! It is certain that we did not know how to hold this artist. The great official fame and publicity he received, the money success, were not sufficient for him, perhaps because of the element of falseness involved and the emptiness that he experienced from it. He was a magnificent "fellow traveler" of the revolution useful and courageous; he squandered the best part of himself in futile and harassing search for some correct ideological line that he could never find for many reasons, and that a handful of petty pedants and petty censors demanded from him because that was their job, their way of earning their bread and butter (not in the sweat of their brow). Having become a brilliant rhymster, the most sought after by the newspapers he suffered from this daily demand which was bound to be ruinous to his art and the richest part of his personality. He made the best of a bad job up to a certain point. His work of the last years remained very unequal and full of weaknesses. He was aware of this. He felt himself diminishing. He did not cease to justify himself and to plead superior force.

What lesson can be drawn from the finish of this career of a great poet attached

delivered the German workers over to the tender mercies of the Dawes and Young Plans. And has the course of the "Labor Government" in Great Britain differed in any essential respect? What plans and election promises of socialism have they carried out even on an "installment" plan? They have not had the power? Then what are they doing in office. They are serving the class that has the power—the capitalist class.

We have adduced the classic experience of the German and the British social democrats. We could with equal truth, space permitting, have dealt with the like "socialist" evidence from Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, France or any other party in the Second International. Consider the Russian Mensheviks who strove obstinately to divert the Russian revolution into the channels of a conventional bourgeois republic for expansion of private capital; and now continually hope for a crisis which will compel the Soviet Union to retrace its path to a "democratic revolution" (denationalization of the factories, a stop to collectivization of the country-side, cessation of support of revolutionary movement abroad, entrance into League of Nations, etc.).

The Role of the Maxtons

The writer of the letter refers to the Independent Labor Party (Maxton group) as the "real" socialist party. Once more he argues from the present pseudo-oppositionist of the Maxton group as if we had no political experience of the role of the "Independent" socialists in the working

with every fiber to the present—to this present which Yessenin could never completely grasp. The better part of wisdom is to leave these "fellow travelers" to find their own road, and to find their own work without pretending to baptize them, catechize them, regiment them, without imposing on them too minute requirements, without imagining that one can by the combined method of copyright, suppression, criticism and lashings in the press "bolshelize" them to the marrow.

A Stalinized «Ten Days That Shook the World»

No proper appraisal of the Bolshevik Revolution of November, 1917, can be made without giving due consideration to all the leaders of the Russian people who played leading roles and made the Revolution possible.

That is why we of the Opposition so insistently and always expose the attempted falsifications of history of Yaroslavsky and other Stalinist historians. Comrade Trotsky's great part in the revolution cannot be explained away permanently. Future history we know must give him the credit due him.

I have just seen the picture "Ten Days That Shook the World". The great mass events of the "Ten Days" are faithfully given. The photography, direction and scenery are all wonderful and as we know from other Russian pictures, it is a refreshing change from the usual American pictures. But the point any serious student of events will notice very quickly in "Ten Days" is the entire omission of L.D. Trotsky anywhere in the acting of the picture. The impression an uninformed observer gets is that he must have played a very minor role when we all know that the names of Lenin and Trotsky were inseparably connected with the whole Revolution as well as all of the first years following it.

I could not help but ask myself, "What would Lenin say?" about the entire omission of the man who was President of the Petrograd Soviet in the crisis and of whom Stalin himself has written, "All the work of practical organization was conducted under the immediate leadership of the President of the Petrograd Soviet, comrade Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the Soviet, and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee, the Party owes principally and above all to comrade Trotsky." (*Pravda*, No. 241—"Role of the Most Eminent Party Leaders".)

John Reed is given no credit for the title, as he should be, especially before American audiences.

—W. P. S.

class movement. But we have, and it is more than melancholy experience. These "Left Oppositions" in the social democracy are always the reflection of rank and file unrest, dissatisfaction and radicalization. The function of the Maxtons is to canalize this movement, avowedly to prevent it from flowing into the currents of Communism. Their "independence" is a sham. In the course of the developing class struggle in Germany, the Independent Socialists split, the Right going to the majority socialists, the Left to the Communists. The Austrian social democracy presents one of the most shameful spectacles of verbal radicalism as a cover for a petty bourgeois policy of surrender to the pressure of big bourgeois reaction. A municipal program of bigger and better apartment houses and swimming pools cannot conceal the fact that in every crisis Otto Bauer and his associates have held the proletariat back from revolutionary action to the point where the forces of the bourgeoisie, of clericalism and fascism have never been so powerful since the war.

The Way of Thomas

In the light of all this we see no reason for inventing some unique exception to the internationally tested principles and experiences of the class struggle so as to exempt Norman Thomas.

Just now it costs him nothing gently to remind the British labor imperialists of the necessity of a modicum of internationalism in their relations with India. It would not be difficult to find an equivalent sentiment among certain sections of the petty bourgeoisie outside the socialist leadership. After all this is England's funeral. It was not hard in the past, nor in the war to whip up petty bourgeois enthusiasm for the right of self-determination of the other fellow's subject nationalities and more than once the world rocked with accusations of Belgium's mismanagement of the Congo, of Germany's brutalities in her African colonies, of Austrian repressions in Bosnia. During the Brest Litovsk negotiations even the German militarists suddenly manifested an ardent desire for the self-determination—of the Ukraine... But this Norman Thomas is the man who shortly after the New York civic elections proposed to change the name of his party from "socialist" in order to make it more palatable to and indistinguishable from, the liberals, and was only prevented by the opposition of the more cautious Hillquit.

The Line of Bolshevism

We are quite ready to have the record of Bolshevism stand comparison. The achievements of the socialist dictatorship speak for themselves. Under the Communists the Russian workers conquered political power and have held it. They are building the foundations of a socialist society. If they have encountered formidable difficulties the principal reason is not far to seek. The isolation of the Soviet Union, the retardation of the international revolution is the basic objective factor in the difficulties of socialist construction and for this isolation, the successive betrayals of the social democracy and its cooperation with the bourgeoisie, is in turn chiefly responsible. The Communists made mistakes but these mistakes were of an entirely different character from the "mistakes" of the social democrats which were sheer counter-revolution.

Certainly there is no absolute guarantee against the manifestation of conciliatory and social democratic tendencies inside the Communist movement. The present struggle of the factions in the Comintern testifies to that. Under conditions of capitalist stabilization and encirclement of the Soviet Union, of the slowing up in the pace of the world revolution, the petty bourgeoisie begins to exert a pressure on the Soviet and Comintern apparatus that is dangerous. The consequences of such pressure have in some major instances already been tragic. It has been the requirements of the resistance to this petty bourgeois pressure on the Party that has given rise to the fight of the Left Opposition for the continuity of the line of Marx and Lenin against both the Right and Centrist factions in the Comintern. With a keen memory of the reasons for the degeneration of the social democratic leadership, the Left Opposition is determined to fight to the end against every revision of the program of the proletarian revolution, against every deviation from the base of internationalism.

—M. SP.