

EDITORIAL NOTES

HERBERG QUOTES TROTSKY

We learned from Shakespeare that the devil can cite scriptures for his purpose, and this maxim is called to mind by the attempt of the Right wing of American Communism to make use of a quotation from Trotsky. In the March 14th issue of the *Revolutionary Age*, Herberg takes a few sentences from the revolutionary writings of the leader of the International Left Opposition and tries to fit them into an opportunist frame. In his search after an "authority" for the idea that objective causes pre-determine the passivity of American labor in the crisis, he cites, as "explanation which deserves serious consideration", the following remarks in Trotsky's autobiography:

"After a period of big battles and defeats, a crisis has the effect of depressing rather than arousing the working class. It undermines the workers' confidence in their power and demoralizes them politically. Under such conditions only an industrial revival can close the ranks of the proletariat, pour fresh blood into its veins, restore its confidence in itself and make it capable of further struggle."

As a general proposition it cannot be denied that international experience has tended to confirm this clear and precise formulation of the question. If Herberg were referring to it in that sense no one could object. But in offering Trotsky's general formula to explain away a radical perspective of the American crisis, Herberg distorts its meaning and applies it to a specific and concrete situation where it does not fit. Trotsky's conclusions, as quoted by Herberg, presuppose a number of factors which are absent in the concrete case of the American crisis and its effect on the labor movement.

In the first place, our crisis did not follow "a period of big battles and defeats", of the workers, except in the case of the miners. In the second place, the passivity of the workers did not arise from the crisis, as Herberg implies, but existed over a long period before it and arose on the basis of the prosperity. And finally, we maintain that the crisis has already exerted more of a radicalizing than a depressing influence on the working class of America. Illustrations: The unemployment demonstrations; the increase of Communist and Socialist votes; Lawrence strike, etc. From all these facts, which are specific peculiarities of the American crisis situation, it is clear that the opportunist has quoted the Marxist only to distort him.

How significant is this little incident! Out of the voluminous literary productions of Trotsky—a veritable library on the theme of how to grasp the revolutionary situation and win the victory—the American Brandlerites extract one small paragraph devoted to retreats and defeats, and quote it, with approval, in a false connection. Anything will do—even a chance word from Trotsky—to bolster up the theory that "the reserves of American imperialism" remain unshaken. The "reserves" of the masters of America are undoubtedly very great, but the reserves of the proletariat are even greater. In our opinion the crisis is serving and will serve to awaken more workers to the consciousness of this fact.

Contradictory forces are at work in the crisis, but its main effect, already revealed to a certain extent, is to arouse wide sections of the workers out of the stupor and passivity induced by illusions of permanent prosperity. The crisis is thus maturing the conditions for a militant labor revival on an unprecedented scale. In view of all the circumstances of America's setting in the world situation, it is most reasonable to calculate that this development, once well started, will march with seven league boots.

Proletarian Communists, in contradistinction to opportunist theorizers of defeat, will hold such a perspective and work for it. On this point a quotation from comrade Trotsky (not one torn from its context and mis-applied, but one directly contributed to the American situation) will be in order. In his letter to the first National Conference of the Communist League in the early part of 1929 he said:

"We must not for a moment lose sight of the fact that the right of American com-

These clear and refreshing words outline a bold revolutionary perspective for the American proletariat. For that reason Right wing snivellers, who seek to invoke his authority for an opportunist policy, would never think of repeating them.

LAWRENCE GIVES THE SIGNAL.

The Lawrence strike ended suddenly in a compromise, but the twelve-day demonstration of the textile workers there had a nation-wide significance. It was heard from one end of the country to the other like a thunder-clap in a dead calm, warning of a coming storm. There is no doubt that it had a heartening influence on the conscious sections of the workers everywhere, stirring them with the thought that the signal for struggle had been sounded by an authoritative voice.

Lawrence is a name to conjure with. The tradition of 1912 has lost none of its luster with the passing of the years. The memory of that heroic example is a part of the armament, not only of the workers of Lawrence, but of the entire labor movement of America. That is why the militant, if short-lived, demonstration of the past weeks was a national bugle call.

The masters of America, sitting uneasily on a volcano of working class misery in the crisis, were no less alarmed than the workers were inspired by the strike. This was shown by the feverish attempts to get it settled before it could consolidate its organization and extend its scope. The frenzied persecution of the strike leaders was prompted by their terror, as also were their concessions to the strikers, offered so soon after the strike began—a procedure quite unusual in the textile industry. The direct and immediate intervention of the federal government, with deportation warrants against some of the strike leaders, was a clear recognition that the strike was regarded by the capitalist over-lords as a national affair.

The National Textile Workers' Union appeared in Lawrence as the organization for the strike. That is also a sign of the times. A militant organization is the prerequisite for an effective struggle by the textile workers of Lawrence or anywhere else. To allow the corrupt machine of McMahon the right of way in a textile workers' strike is to condemn it in advance to betrayal and defeat.

A real and serious preparation for the great battles yet to come in this field presupposes the strengthening of the National Textile Workers' Union against the treason machine of the U. T. W. This must never be forgotten. To help the N. T. W. prepare for the coming days means also to insist on a correct policy and a correct régime within it. This must not be forgotten either.

THE TRADE UNION TURN

It has been demonstrated many times that apparatus Centrism, which dominates the Comintern and the party today, is not a stable political tendency and is not capable of carrying out a consistent line of policy on any question. The thesis of the Right wing, which characterizes the régime as "sectarian" and attributes all evils to that, is superficial and incorrect. "Sectarianism", even in the worst sense, implies a certain constancy and conduct that unprincipled Centrism cannot even dream of. Just the contrary. The statesmen of Stalinism are distinguished above all by the ability to jump from one position to its opposite; and by the readiness to denounce on one day what they advocated on the day before. Witness the liquidation of the "third period" and the tactics flowing from it. Witness, in the realm of tactics, the right-about-face in trade union policy. The Right wing is obliged to deny obvious facts in order to maintain its thesis. That is why their insistence on "ultra-Left sectarianism" is losing all point, and consequently all power to influence the party members.

On several occasions, and particularly in the statement issued by our group in the needle trades, the Opposition has called attention to the manifest signs of the turn in

would be changed and that our criticism would be a factor in hastening it.

Events have already confirmed this prediction, and unavoidably so. The party does not and cannot operate in a vacuum. It is an organ of the class struggle and lives constantly under its pressure. In the trade union field, the field of the basic and elementary organization of the masses, an arbitrary and unsound policy cannot fail to bring violent repercussions. Errors, especially a system of errors, on the trade union question brings swift and inevitable punishment. That is what has happened.

And already we find the party leaders admitting in the *Daily Worker* for February 28th that "our party has not yet learned the proper way to carry on trade union work." Of course it is somewhat dishonest to blame "our party", because it is the leaders who are responsible for the policy. But even in this they do not disappoint us. To demand honesty from Foster and Stachel would be to convict oneself of utopianism; of asking for things which are not attainable.

When we establish the fact that the party leadership is attempting to make a turn in trade union policy we do not mean thereby to express any confidence in them for the future. And our distrust is in no way diminished by the fact that they repeat now, with literal precision, phrases and formulae taken from the Opposition's platform. We have seen that happen before. They climb out of one ditch only to fall into another. Centrism has no ideas of its own; it must borrow from the Right or from the Left as occasion demands.

In this article they say:

"No systematic and persistent work is carried on for winning over the workers who are members of reformist and other reactionary trade unions". (Yesterday they were "company unions".)

Again:

"Bring into the revolutionary trade unions ALL WORKERS IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS, INCLUDING THOSE WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY." (The emphasis is in the original to call special attention to a truth which they have just discovered.)

A third quotation:

"In no case should they permit the directions of the party leaders on the fundamental questions of trade union activity to be carried out mechanically." (This is said by the people who called the Illinois miners out on strike without even the formality of a strike vote.)

In this article in the *Daily Worker*, which is prefaced with a note about its "extreme importance," a clear change of policy is indicated. The bureaucrats have been compelled to lay aside their counter-felt Leftism in the trade union movement. Their pseudo-radical policy was proved by events to be completely bankrupt. They could no longer conceal the fact that the position of the party in the trade union movement was undermined by it.

The danger now is a big swing to the Right in the characteristic manner of Centrism. In cooperating with the party's effort to extricate itself from the evil consequences of the "third period" tactics we must

warn the Communist workers against this danger.

THE DEATH OF JOHN DONLIN

John Donlin, veteran of the revolutionary labor movement, is dead at Kansas City at the age of 68. In this tragic event the Communist movement suffers a real loss. The memory of this exemplary man and revolutionist is very dear to those who fought beside him in the past and it is not easy to speak of him as of one no longer in the struggle. For the writer of these lines the name of John Donlin stands today—as it has stood for twenty years—as the symbol of a model soldier for whom devotion and service to the cause of the proletariat is its own justification and its own reward.

John Donlin was not a conspicuous figure, not a hero acclaimed by the crowd. He lived and worked obscurely as a man of the rank and file. He was a true "Jimmy Higgins"—that ideal militant of Ben Hanford's portrayal. He never made a speech, but he carried the soap-box for many a speaker. He was not a writer, but he could distribute the literature written by other men—and throw a dollar into the hat to pay for it. He was not a leader and never pretended to be one. But he could set before leaders an example of unwavering allegiance to principle. His biography, like that of uncounted thousands who have worked in quiet places, can be written simply: He lived, he worked for the revolution, and he died.

With his death the Communist movement in the middle West has lost a personality which was a bond uniting it with the best traditions of the past—with the Socialist Party of Debs and Hanford and with the I. W. W. in its days of glory. In the person of John Donlin the revolutionary proletariat was represented by the figure of a man who was able, in a rare degree, to rise above the mean and petty self-concern generated by the class society of the present day and to approach the dignity and stature of the Communist man of the future.

By contemporary standards John Donlin was not a success in life. He was a worker, and as such his rewards were meager. The best energies of his manhood's prime were given to the revolution. Physical ailments, joined with the direst poverty, assailed him like twin monsters in his declining years. But his unconquerable spirit rose triumphant over all the vicissitudes of personal fortune, and he remained to the last a confident revolutionist. The old warrior never shirked his duties, even though his duty—as he saw it—consisted in the distribution of a leaflet.

While carrying out such a task he was arrested and confined in the hell-hole of Leeds Farm where once before he served a sentence in the Free Speech Fight of 1913. The indignities and abuses he suffered there brought on his death. Thus, despite his great infirmities, he died in harness as a worker and fighter for the cause. By our standards such a life represents a real success. It will be vindicated. A new generation of proletarian revolutionaries will pick up his banner and carry it to victory.

J. P. C.

WORKS BY LEON TROTSKY FOR YOUR LIBRARY

- THE DRAFT PROGRAM OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL**
A Criticism of Fundamentals Introduction by James P. Cannon
Price 35c 140 pages, hard paper cover In bundles 25c
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