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UNITE

THE MILITANT



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Lenin on the Paris Commune

We reprint below an article by Lenin on the significance of the Paris Commune to the international working class. Lenin and the Bolsheviks absorbed the lessons taught by Marx and Engels on the Commune and found these invaluable in their struggle for the Russian Revolution. On the sixty-first anniversary of the Paris Commune it is fitting for us to reprint this brief writing penned by one who helped carry out the tasks the heroic Parisian Communards set themselves, continued their work, and began the class revenge of the world proletariat against the bloody suppression of the Commune by leading the Russian workers to the victorious Red October.—Ed.

Forty years have passed since the proclamation of the Paris Commune. According to their custom, the French proletariat are honouring the memory of the revolutionary workers of March 18, 1871, by meetings and demonstrations. At the end of May they will again bring wreaths to the tombs of the Communards who were shot, the victims of the fearful "May Week", and over their graves they will once more take the oath to fight unflinchingly until their ideas have conquered, until their cause has been completely victorious.

Why do the proletariat, not only in France but throughout the entire world, honour the workers of the Paris Commune as their forerunners? What was the heritage of the Commune?

The Commune broke out spontaneously. No one consciously prepared it in an organized way. The unsuccessful war with Germany, privations during the siege, unemployment among the proletariat and ruin among the petty-bourgeoisie: the indignation of the masses against the upper classes and against the authorities who had displayed their complete incapacity, an indefinable fermentation among the working class, which was discontented with its lot, and was striving towards a different social system; the reactionary make-up of the National Assembly, which roused fears as to the fate of the republic—all this and many other things combined to drive the population of Paris to revolution on March 18, which unexpectedly placed power in the hands of the National Guard, in the hands of the working class and the petty-bourgeoisie which had joined in with it.

This was an event unprecedented in history. Up to that time power had customarily been in the hands of landlords and capitalists, i. e., in the hands of their trusted agents who made up the so-called Government. After the revolution of March 18, when with their troops, their police and its officials, the people remained masters of the situation and power passed into the hands of the proletariat. But in modern society, enslaved economically by capital, the proletariat cannot dominate politically unless it breaks the chains which fetter it to capital. This is why the movement of the Commune inevitably had to take on a Socialist colouring, i. e., to begin striving for the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie, the power of capital, to destroy the very foundations of the present social order.

At first this movement was extremely indefinite and confused. It was joined by patriots who hoped that the Commune would renew the war with the Germans and bring it to a successful conclusion. It was supported by the small shopkeepers who were threatened with ruin unless there was a postponement of payments on debts and rent (the Government did not want to give them such a postponement but the Commune gave it). Finally, it had, at first, the sympathy of the bourgeois republicans, who feared that the reactionary National Assembly (the "backwoodsmen", ignorant landlords) would restore the monarchy. But the chief role in this movement was of course played by the workers (especially the artisans of Paris), among whom Socialist propaganda had been energetically carried on during the last years of the Second Empire and many of whom even belonged to the First International.

Only the workers remained loyal to the Commune to the end. The bourgeois republicans and the petty-bourgeoisie soon broke away from it, the former afraid of the revolutionary Socialist proletarian character of the movement, and the others dropping out when they saw that it was doomed to inevitable defeat. Only the French proletariat supported their Government fearlessly and unflinchingly, they alone fought and died for it, for the cause of the emancipation of the working class, for a better future for all toilers.

Deserted by their allies of yesterday and supported by no one, the Commune was doomed to inevitable defeat. The entire bourgeoisie of France, all the landlords, the stockbrokers, the factory owners, all the great and small robbers, all the exploiters, combined against it. This bourgeois coalition, supported by Bismarck (who released a hundred thousand French soldiers who had been

taken prisoner to put down revolutionary Paris), succeeded in rousing the backward peasants and the petty bourgeoisie of the provinces against the proletariat of Paris, and in surrounding half of Paris with a ring of steel (the other half was held by the German army). In some of the larger cities in France (Marseilles, Lyons, St. Etienne, Dijon, etc.) the workers also attempted to seize power, to proclaim the Commune, and come to the help of Paris, but these attempts soon failed. Paris, which had first raised the flag of proletarian revolt, was left to its own resources and doomed to certain destruction.

For the victory of the social revolution, at least two conditions are necessary: a high development of productive forces and the preparedness of the proletariat. But in 1871 neither of these conditions was present. French capitalism was still only slightly developed, and France was at that time mainly a country of petty-bourgeoisie (artisans, peasants, shopkeepers, etc.). On the other hand there was no workers' party, the working class, which in the mass was unprepared and untrained, did not even clearly visualize its tasks and the methods of fulfilling them. There were no serious political organizations of the proletariat, no strong trade unions and co-operative societies.

But the chief thing which the Commune lacked was the time to think out and undertake the fulfillment of its programme. It hardly had time to start working, when the Versailles government, supported by the entire bourgeoisie, opened military operations against Paris. The Commune had to think first of all of defence. Right up to the very end, May 21-28, it had no time to think seriously of anything else.

In spite of such unfavorable conditions, in spite of the brevity of its existence, the Commune found time to carry out some measures which sufficiently characterize its real significance and aims. The Commune replaced the standing army, that blind weapon in the hands of the ruling classes, by the armed people. It proclaimed the separation of church from State, abolished the State support of religious bodies (i. e., State salaries for priests), gave popular education a purely secular character, and in this way struck a severe blow at the gendarmes in priestly robes. In the purely social sphere the Commune could do very little, but this little nevertheless clearly shows its character as a popular workers' Government. Night work in bakeries was forbidden, the system of fines, this system of legalized robbery of the workers, was abolished. Finally, the famous decree was issued according to which all factories, works and workshops which had been abandoned or stopped by their owners, were to be handed over to associations of workers in order to resume production. And, as if to emphasize its character as a truly democratic proletarian Government, the Commune decreed that the salaries of all ranks in the administration and the government should not exceed the normal wages of a worker, and in no case should exceed 6,000 francs per year.

All these measures showed with sufficient clearness that the Commune was a deadly menace to the old world, founded on slavery and exploitation. Therefore bourgeois society could not sleep peacefully so long as the Red Flag of the proletariat waved over the Paris City Hall. When at last the organized force of the Government had managed to defeat the poorly organized forces of the revolution, the Bonapartist generals who had been beaten by the Germans and who were brave only when fighting their defeated countrymen, these French Rennekampfs and Meller-Sakomelskys, organized such a slaughter as Paris has never known. About 30,000 Parisians were killed by the ferocious soldiers, about 45,000 were arrested and many of these were afterwards executed, thousands were imprisoned or exiled. In all, Paris lost about 100,000 of its sons, including the best workers of all trades.

The bourgeoisie were satisfied. "Now we have finished with Socialism for a long time," said their leader, the blood-thirsty dwarf, Thiers, after the blood-bath which he and his generals had arranged for the proletariat of Paris. But these bourgeois crows cawed in vain. Six years after the suppression of the Commune, when many of its fighters were still pining in prison or in exile, a new workers' movement rose in France. A new Socialist generation, enriched by the experience of their predecessors and no whit discouraged by their defeat, picked up the flag which had dropped from the hands of the fighters of the Commune and bore it boldly and confidently forward, with cries of: "Long live the social revolution! Long live the Commune!" And a few years after that, the new workers' party and the agitation roused by it throughout the country, compelled the ruling classes to release the imprisoned Communards, who were still in the hands of the government.

The memory of the fighters of the Commune is not only honoured by the

New Trotsky Series on Germany Starts Next Week

Beginning with the next issue, *The Militant* will print extracts from comrade Trotsky's new book on Germany. The book has just arrived and is being translated into English. The table of contents are: **Democracy and Fascism; The Social Democratic Party and the Policy of the Lesser Evil; The Italian Experience; The Communist Party and the Working Class; The United Front Policy (Fundamental Principles); The Soviets as Organs of the United Front; The Russian Experience; What Is Centrism; Bureaucratic Centrism (The International Stalin Faction); The S. A. P. and Its Future; Brandfr, Urbans and Others; Economic Struggles and Trade Union Unity; The Political Mass Strike, Workers' Control of Production; From Defensive to Offensive.**

workers of France but by the proletariat of the whole world, for the Commune did not fight for any local or narrow national aim, but for the freedom of the whole humanity, of all the downtrodden and oppressed. As the foremost fighter for the social revolution, the Commune has won sympathy wherever there is a proletariat struggling and suffering. The picture of its life and death, the sight of a workers' government which seized the capital of the world and kept it in its hands for over two months, the spectacle of the heroic struggle of the proletariat and its sufferings after defeat—all this has raised the spirit of millions of workers, aroused their hopes and attracted their sympathies to the side of socialism. The thunder of the cannon in Paris awakened the most backward strata of the proletariat from deep slumber, and everywhere gave impetus to the growth of revolutionary Socialist propaganda. This is why the cause of the Commune did not die. It lives to the present day in every one of us.

The cause of the Commune is the social revolution, the cause of the complete political and economic emancipation of the toilers. It is the cause of the proletariat of the whole world. And in this sense it is immortal.

Kabochaya Gazeta, No. 4-5, April 28 (15), 1911.

After the Massacre in Detroit

The militant mass funeral of the Ford massacre victims registered the angry answer of the Detroit workers to the wanton murder of last week. The victims were laid to rest with full proletarian honors. The imposing funeral march lent further emphasis to the growing working class demand for unemployment relief.

In this automobile capital the curse of unemployment has become particularly acute. It is openly admitted by the city authorities that the jobless ranks are growing. In this respect the index prepared by the Detroit Board of Commerce gives illuminating figures. It records a recent drop to a present low of 68.6 per cent of what was considered a normal monthly employment average of 100 in 1923-1925 for the whole working population. In the month of February this year there were 50,000 less employed in Detroit than the same month a year ago. With no unemployment relief, save for the scant charity crumbs, the workers' conditions have become ever more desperate. Stark misery and starvation

Remember Our Prisoners

One of the surest tests of the revolutionary qualities of a workers' organization is its attitude toward the working class fighters in the prisons of the class enemy. Remembrance of the class war prisoners must take a practical form—unceasing struggle for their liberation and material provision for their prison needs.

Comrade Morgenstern and Goodman have a special claim on us because they are our own people who have been victimized for their fight for our cause. Their claim on the members and supporters of the Communist League is all the stronger because they have been deserted by the defense organizations maintained by the workers for the benefit of all class war prisoners—the I. L. D. Therefore, let us take care of our own!

The Militant deems it a duty to open a prison relief fund for the benefit of our comrades. Our readers are requested to send contributions to this fund c/o *The Militant*, 84 East 10th St., New York City. Released reports of all receipts of this fund will be printed regularly and the proceeds forwarded to the comrades in prison.

Friday, March 18!
"THE GERMAN ELECTIONS"
Lecture by
SAM GORDON
at the LABOR TEMPLE

Results of the German Elections

Gains of Reaction Serious Warning against Stalinist Policy

Last Sunday's presidential elections in Germany were breathlessly watched by a world torn by economic crisis and apprehensive of social convulsions. For the bourgeois philistine, for the addict of parliamentary cretinism, the elections constitute a fait accompli, an established fact. Thus, for instance, the American press, in its comment on the results of Sunday's poll, sees a decisive repulsion of Fascism and a permanent victory for the "inherently conservative character" of the German people. Hitler's inability to muster a larger vote than Hindenburg to them spells Hitler's defeat. For the revolutionary, for the Marxist, the elections constitute merely a gauge of social and political developments. It is therefore only natural for us to regard the bourgeois press comment with a grain of skepticism. With them, it is a case of the wish being the father of the thought. The American bourgeoisie fears social unrest, abroad as well as at home, worse than the pest. An advance of Fascism can only mean an outbreak of civil war in Germany. To hush away the chimera of such a civil war, its press prefers to overlook the facts.

To be sure, Hitler only rallied 11,500,000 votes to Hindenburg's 18,000,000. But when we consider that the Fascist gain amounted to some 5,000,000 votes more than the 6,400,000 they received in the Reichstag elections in 1930, and when we look at this fact objectively, dispassionately, we cannot fail to come to the conclusion that the elections reflected a tremendous and absolutely menacing advance on part of the Fascists. To be sure, it appears that the Fascists have very little resources left for further progress by purely legal means. The percentage of their vote is considerably lower than in the partial elections in 1931. But that only increases the probability of a forceful attempt at the seizure of power by the Hitlerites. The very character of the social composition of the Hitler camp, the fact that it is subject to violent fluctuations in political sentiment makes the thought of a "peaceful" growing into power of the National Socialists improbable. No one knows this better than Hitler himself. It is

only natural to assume that Hitler will act accordingly. The menace of Fascism hangs more heavily over the head of the German working class than ever.

How did the working class forces fare in the elections? The only working class candidate in the field, the candidate of the Communist Party, Ernst Thaelmann, received a total of 4,900,000 out of the 37,000,000 votes cast. All in all, a gain of some 350,000 over the 4,537,000 votes the Communist Party received in 1930. When we compare this gain with the 5,000,000 gain of the Fascists, when we keep in mind the fact that Thaelmann was the only working class candidate in the field—the social democrats renounced a candidacy of their own in favor of the Hohenzollern Field Marshall—and finally when we consider the sharpness of the economic situation, we can only admit that the Communist candidate suffered a disastrous defeat in Sunday's elections. That is the bare fact. The entire import of this fact must be realized by every Communist fighter, by every sincere revolutionist. The lesson of the election must be brought home to the class conscious workers: the conclusions must be drawn from it before it is too late before the decisive blow has been struck.

The election defeat of Thaelmann does not mean a defeat for the working class, a defeat for Communism. That is not decided by election, that is decided in open struggle, in the factories, in the streets. It does mean a debacle for the Stalinist policy of the German party leadership. It should serve as a warning to all serious and devoted worker-Communists in the ranks of the official party. Let us review the facts. The Hindenburg - Bruening - Groener regime has been represented in the eyes of all German workers, the social democratic as well as the Communist workers, as the dictatorship by emergency decree, as the government of increasing misery, of wage-cuts carried out by cabinet order; of the reduction of unemployment insurance to the point of starvation; of the abrogation of the most elementary working class rights; of the introduction of National Socialists into the army. No worker could possibly overlook these facts.

The Social democracy, versed in the ways of working class betrayal, called upon its followers to vote for this regime in the presidential elections, nevertheless. More than that, it was actually able to rally its followers behind this hunger-regime almost to a man. That is astonishing at first, but it must be understood. Why did the social democratic workers vote for Hindenburg? The social democratic misleaders called upon their worker-followers to vote for Hindenburg as the "lesser evil" against Fascism. Did the social democratic workers actually believe that this regime of hunger and starvation for the working class will fight against Fascism? Hardly. Why, then did they nevertheless vote for Hindenburg? They voted for Hindenburg because the situation seemed hopeless to them, because it was the only choice left to them outside of the united front of the working class.

Whose fault is it that the proletariat united front was not established? Can the social democratic leaders be expected to establish the united front. Never. Their entire composition, their character as lackeys of the capitalist class, as agents of the capitalists within the ranks of labor, makes such a step on their part unthinkable. Yet, what all the workers really desired was a fighting

united front against the menace that was directly threatening them, against Fascism. Both social democratic and Communist workers had fallen in the slaughter brought about by the Nazis in their punitive expeditions into Brunswick, both reformist and revolutionary workers were victimized in the daily attacks made upon working class meetings, groups and colonies. It was only natural for the workers to feel the necessity of fighting first and foremost against this danger.

The task of creating a united front of active struggle against Fascism could only be carried out by the Communists, by the revolutionary party. It was the duty of the Communists to force the social democratic leaders, already under pressure from their rank and file, into this united front, to put them to the test before their own followers. That was duty clearly devolving upon the revolutionary party from the general situation. What did the Stalinist leadership do instead. It rejected any united front whatsoever with the "social Fascists" and called upon the social democratic workers to join the "Red united front under the leadership of the Communist party". By the rejection of the Leninist conception of the united front, the Stalinist Central Committee of the German party repelled the reformist workers, left them helpless in the face of the treacherous machinations of their leadership. It was in this manner that the social reformists were able to swing the bulk of the German proletariat behind the candidacy of the Bruening hunger regime.

The result of the German presidential elections is a warning against the nefarious tactic of the German Stalinites. If it is not heeded, the working class of Germany faces disaster. If it is taken into account, the tactic must be changed immediately. More than that, the theory of "social Fascism" which is the source of all these disastrous developments, must be disproved. It is this theory, which throws all opponents of the revolutionary party into one pot, without distinguishing between them and without exploiting the various conflicts among them; which bears all the earmarks of the Lassallean theory of the "single reactionary mass" condemned and refuted by Marx in his "Criticism of the Gotha Program"; it is this theory that has left a trail of confusion in the minds of the Communist militants and one of disaster in the development of the class struggle.

The main danger seen clearly by every worker in Germany today is the Fascist danger, the Hitlerite danger. Every worker regards this question as one of life and death. The Communist party of Germany must realize this fact, if it is not to pursue its road to destruction, if the working class of Germany is to avoid extermination at the hands of Hitler's butchers.

The tremendous vote rolled up by the Fascists last Sunday, far from being a setback for the Nazi forces, is only a step in their march toward the seizure of power, toward the open attack against the proletariat. The coming weeks and months will no doubt witness more daring and more impudent assaults upon the workers' organizations by the Fascists than ever before. The workers are bound to feel the Hitlerite edgel even more sharply than before. Their reactions toward the threat and their feeling for the need of working class unity are going to be much more profound in the future. The tactic of the united front will be on the order of the day more than ever. —SAM GORDON.

New York Marine Workers Go to Trial

The three marine workers, who have been confined in Tombs jail since last November in the New York "Dynamite Plot", went to trial Monday in the court of General Sessions, Division 1. The first three days were consumed in the examination of prospective jurors. As the *Militant* went to press, eleven jurors had been selected and the defense, conducted by Peter L. F. Sabbatino and Jacob Fishman, had exhausted nineteen of its twenty peremptory challenges.

The prosecution concentrated its objections, in the selection of the jury, on all who had been connected with the labor movement in any way or who were readers of labor or liberal publications. The plan to put the dynamiting charges over on a wave of red baiting was indicated in the detailed questioning of every one called for jury service as to his acquaintance with or knowledge of the various radical labor organizations or the individual members of the Marine Workers' Defense Committee, which is conducting the defense movement in behalf of the prisoners.

The defendants are members of the Independent Tidewater Boatmen's Union. The charges against them have been exposed as a conspiracy against union organization in the New York har-

bor, and a number of workers' organizations, including the Communist League of America, joined forces in the Marine Workers' Defense Committee to provide their defense. On Saturday the defense Committee issued a new appeal for the solidarity and support of the workers on the eve of the trial and emphasized the need of funds for the legal expenses. All readers of the *Militant* are urged to respond to this appeal and to send funds to the Marine Workers' Defense Committee, 82 East Tenth Street, New York.

Next Week's Forum

On Friday, March 25 at 8 P. M. comrade Cannon will speak at the N. Y. open forum at the Labor Temple on **Marxist History and Bourgeois Criticism**—The History of the Russian Revolution and Its Critics. The lecture will be an oral review of comrade Trotsky's work and reviews of it which have appeared in the press.

NOTE TO OUR READERS

For technical reasons, we have been forced to postpone the final installment of Rakovsky's article on the Five Year Plan until next week.

—THE MILITANT.