

Fifty Years of Israel Amter

The hard life of the revolutionist is not without its compensations. The fret and travail of the struggle and the gray details of daily work are relieved from time to time by ceremonial affairs and jubilees at which, in contemplation of great men and great events of the past, the militant may refresh his soul and renew his inspiration. The anniversaries of the illustrious dead have been such occasions. But nowadays, with so many heroes still among us in the flesh, the birthdays of our living chiefs become occasions for official celebration. Not long ago the masses were invited to felicitate Stalin on his fiftieth birthday. And now, according to the reports in the *Daily Worker*, Israel Amter is about to reach the half century mark, and a great outpouring of spontaneous enthusiasm is to be given outlet at an official "mass celebration" of his birthday.

It is needless to say that we welcome this event, for we were converted long ago to the doctrine of "flowers for the living"—that is, if one feels flowery about them. And who could feel otherwise about Amter, who has done so much and isn't finished yet? It is probable that we will not get to the celebration. But anyway we will weave a garland of encomiums in the hope that it will not be entirely buried under the floral offerings.

The ceremonial articles and official greetings which have been printed so far review his life and deeds. We will follow the same pattern. And if we fill in some neglected details, it can be attributed to the fact that we write under less constraint than the others and therefore can speak more freely and sincerely.

One hero began his career as a piano player, and they say he was a good one. But the tunes he extracted from that classic instrument were nothing to the rhythms he produced when he began to play dittos with the Communist movement. Like the jazz composers in the musical field, he specialized in the bizarre and the unique. His self-expression, through the medium of the revolutionary movement, took a distinctively individualistic form. In all that he said and did he was strictly Amter, and nobody else.

Amter made his debut on the national stage of the Party at the first undrafted attention by his fearless and undrafted attention by his fearless and uncompromising demands for the propaganda of "armed insurrection", to be promoted by leaflets hurled into the midst of the masses from ambush. Soon after he appears, or rather one of his leaflets appears, in the strike of the Brooklyn Transit workers for a wage increase of 5c an hour. With that mastery of the dialectic which already distinguished him, he "linked up" this "everyday demand" of the unsuspecting street car men, with the final goal of their struggle, and called on them to rise, arms in hand, and capture the power-house.

Falling in this maneuver, because of the unreadiness of the workers, and the fact that the "third period" has not yet arrived, Amter made a slight strategic retreat; but only for the purpose of gathering strength for another leap. Keeping his plans to himself, he took the capitalist forces by surprise with a sudden leaflet in the Spring of 1921 entitled "May Day of Revolution". Due to a hitch somewhere, this leaflet didn't overthrow the class regime, but it did overthrow the Central Committee of the Party at a convention a few weeks later. All the members of the C. E. C. swore they had had nothing to do with the leaflet and knew nothing about it, but this did not save them. Amter's propaganda had set a movement in motion that could not be appeased without some sacrifices, and the heads even of the innocent had to fall.

Amter next appeared as one of the co-authors of the famous "Ford-Dubner" thesis, and leader of the "goose caucus". In this thesis our hero, disguised from his enemies by the pseudonym of Ford, advanced the idea that the illegal existence of the Party was a matter of principle, and that the advocacy of a legal organization in itself, a sign of counter-revolution—a subject in which he later specialized and took several degrees. In this affair Amter suffered a temporary setback, due to the Trotskyist influence then prevailing in the Comintern. His thesis was rejected, the movement was legalized, and Amter, defeated but not terrified, went into a temporary eclipse.

It was at this stage in his career that he began to display that remarkable adaptability that enabled him to keep alive politically in any weather. Unlike the illegal "leftists" who kept muttering about armed insurrection" after the season had passed, Amter got in step with the times. The Farmer-Labor period had arrived, the Paper-Lovestone group of leaders came to the front and took the place of the wild men of the "goose caucus". Amter was one of those who saw the light. He not only joined

the Lovestone faction but became vociferous about it. For several years, right up to the day that the Comintern telegram against Lovestone arrived, Amter was a Lovestoneite in all things great and small.

But even after these years of habituation to the Lovestone formulae and the Lovestone politics he did not become rigid and doctrinaire about it. He retained his flexibility, and finally gave an exhibition of it that will always stand in the history of the party as an example for people who want to know how to change their opinions and change them quick. This was on the day the C. I. cablegram against Lovestone came. He awoke on that fateful morning as loyal and as red-hot a Lovestoneite as you could find with a search warrant. And went through a few morning chores of cursing Fosterites in a routine fashion. At twelve o'clock he received a copy of the telegram to the effect that Lovestone was no longer "kosher". One hour later he was hunting for Lovestoneites to expel from the Party, and was as thick with Foster as one, liberty bond with another.

A man with such a political biography could not be denied recognition. He has a fitting place in the top circle of the hierarchy. His fiftieth birthday is a public event and deserves a public demonstration of some kind. We disagree with the official plans only on one point. Why should it be a "mass celebration"? Why not a mass trial?

Impressions of a National Tour

The tour just completed, which carried the writer through the most important industrial cities in the United States and the two most important centers in Canada allowed for some first hand observations regarding the effects of the deep crisis in Canadian as well as American capitalism. It enables one to draw beyond the confines of New York City, and to see the movement in those industrial centers where the American proletariat dominates—in those sections where the existence of the revolutionary movement is imperative, for the future.

That which strikes one immediately is the extent of the economic crisis. Its terrific sweep over the nerve-centers of the country, carrying in its wake misery for the masses. Miles of sidings are occupied by huge numbers of idle freight cars; small industrial towns with factories are silent. Smokeless chimneys! The largest cities have few factories at work. Thousands upon thousands of unemployed workers make up a weary trek. There is hunger while warehouses are filled with food. The vast numbers of jobless proletarians are not confined to any one town, or state. They are everywhere. Discussions with many workers from various sections of the country exhibit their state of bewilderment. They do not yet comprehend the causes of the vicious crisis. But they are aware that there is something seriously wrong with the character of the system.

There are few movements of the workers. Aside from the attempts of the Communists no movements of struggle exist. Those struggles taking place are under the leadership of the Communist Party. The movements of the unemployed workers are organized by them. But they are still very weak and in many cases ineffectual. Through the policies of the Party these movements have become narrow. They are sectarian and thereby isolated. The tactic of the United Front, the best weapon through which to rally scores of workers is cast aside by the Party and is one of the main reasons for their failure to make greater headway. The Unemployed Councils organized by the Party are choked by the heavy arms of bureaucracy and impede their growth. Yet it is significant that the Communists alone have the courage and will to organize the workers in defense of their interests and in a struggle against capitalism. This is apparent everywhere.

Certainly there are attempts of the reformists to counter the activity of the Party. This is to be expected. Whenever and wherever the Communists are active the reformists rise as a wall to prevent their growth and to canalize these movements. Father Cox arose to check the activity of the Communist Party among the unemployed workers. Similar movements exist in other towns. The Socialist Party is conspicuous in the west by its inactivity, more so, by its reformist preachings and aims.

In the face of impending struggles the bourgeoisie is preparing itself. The revolutionary workers must note keenly the developments in Canada. There, the answer of the government to the growing moods of struggle among the workers, as a result of the deep crisis, is shown in the resurrection of the infamous Article 98 of the Criminal Code. It was through this law that six members of the Central Committee of the Canadian Communist Party were arrested and sentenced to long jail terms. We arrived in Canada immediately after the sentence was confirmed and the comrades sent to Kingston. In the Province of Ontario, the revolutionary movement

TAG DAY FOR MARINE DEFENSE

The Marine Workers' Defense Committee is organizing a Tag Day collection to provide funds for the legal defense of the three New York marine workers now on trial. The collection will take place on Saturday, April 9 and 10. All organizations cooperating in the Marine Defense Committee are called on to provide collectors. The Communist League, Spartacus Youth Club members must turn out in force, according to the decisions of these organizations. All members report to comrade H. Stone at Militant Headquarters for station assignments.

APRIL "Young Spartacus" OUT!

The April issue of *Young Spartacus* which is now out on sale, has a number of very interesting articles of particular interest to the youth as well as to adult workers. The character of the present issue is such that its wide distribution among the ranks of Communists and radical youth would be very valuable. Readers of the *Militant* should order bundles of the *Young Spartacus* and distribute or sell them. The table of contents of the current issue is as follows:
Auto Workers Murdered
Results of German Elections
Trotsky Deprived of Citizenship by Stalin
Students Barred from Kentucky
Capitalism and Child Labor
Students Organize National Movement
Scotsboro Boys Condemned to Death

ing their property for meetings under the threat of arrest and revocation of license. The publication of revolutionary literature barring literature from the mails (The Freiheit, Party literature, Opposition literature is barred from entry) Those receiving literature are liable to arrest. Anyone arrested on a single one of the charges in this article is guilty until proven innocent. Civil employees are instructed to assume the role of spies and to open any suspicious packages and to forthwith inform the authorities. The American Party which has thus far remained more or less silent about the developments in the Canadian movement must take cognizance of them immediately and understand their significance. It is necessary for our Canadian movement to organize itself with the aim of circumventing the drive against it.

The massacre at Detroit and the planned drive against the Communists there; the attack against the Party in Chicago accompanied by frame-up charges of shooting policemen are beginnings of a definite attempt by the government to bring repressions to bear upon the Communists and the workers generally. Already these events have had deep repercussions among the other workers who are repelled by the brutality of Ford's gunmen.

The Left Opposition is gaining greater support. Our meetings had a larger attendance than previously. There is a definite increase of sympathy and support for our movement. In spite of the efforts of the Party bureaucrats to prevent successful meetings they proved more or less ineffectual. (The meetings will be discussed concretely in a forthcoming article). The workers felt keenly our viewpoint on the German situation, and the discussions at our meetings were of a particularly high level. In many cities, the presence of Party members, and of sympathizers with its line, helped to enliven the meetings through their participation in the discussions. Each meeting brought forth new viewpoints and questions. They helped all the more in clarifying our viewpoint on all questions confronting the International Communist Movement.

There was an obvious increase of interest in our press. This must be said particularly of *Unser Kampf*. It has created a deep impression on wide sections of the Jewish workers. References were made to recent articles in the *Freiheit* articles of so low a character that they could be written only by people who have received their political training on the staff of the *Jewish Daily Forward*. The Jewish workers are particularly incensed with the degenerated babble about the "counter-revolutionary Trotsky".

On the whole we can record a wider influence of the Left Opposition. We must strive in the coming year to increase our organizational strength to correspond to our political influence. There is still too wide a discrepancy between the two.

What is outstanding in the whole situation? The lack of organization of the American workers. The Communist Party is still very small. The great mass of workers are unorganized. But the effects of this crisis are resulting in deep changes in the whole character of the American proletariat. Changes are taking place in their whole ideology. These changes, to be sure, are slow. But they are genuine. The great mass of unemployed workers are still in a dazed state. The workers with jobs are in

WHAT NEXT? -- by Leon Trotsky

Chapter 1: The Role of the German Social Democracy

(Continued from page 1)

of the Communists; and even so these mighty gentlemen beg me a functionary, to save them from the attack of another party comprising millions whose leaders may become my bosses tomorrow; things must be pretty bad for the gentlemen of the social democracy, pretty bad for the gentlemen of the social democracy, functionary, to think about my own hide." And as a result, the "loyal", "neutral" functionary who vacillated yesterday, re-insures himself without fail, i. e., ties up with the National Socialists, to safeguard his own future. In this manner the reformists who have outlived their own day, work for the Fascists along bureaucratic lines.

The social democracy, the hanger-on of the bourgeoisie, is doomed to wretched ideological parasitism. One moment it catches up ideas of bourgeois economists, and the next, it tries to utilize bits of Marxism. After citing from my pamphlet the reasons against the participation of the Communist party in Hitler's referendum, Hilferding concludes: "Truly, there is nothing to add to these lines in order to explain the tactics of the social democracy as regards the Bruening government." Rennele and Thalheimer step forward, "Please take note, Hilferding relies on Trotsky." A Fascist yellow sheet steps forward in turn, "Trotsky is paid for this job by the promise of a visa." Next a Stalinist journalist comes to the fore and wires the communication of a Fascist paper to Moscow. The editorial board of the "Izvestia", which includes the unfortunate Radek, prints the telegram. This chain deserves only to be mentioned and passed by.

Let us return to more serious questions. If Hitler can afford himself the luxury of fighting against Bruening, it is only because the bourgeois régime as a whole leans for its support on the back of that half of the working class which is led by Hilferding and Company. If the social democracy had not put through its policy of class betrayal, then Hitler, not to mention the fact that he would have never attained his present power, would have been clutching at Bruening's government as a life saving anchor. If the Communists together with the social democracy had overthrown Bruening, that would have been a fact of the greatest political significance. The consequence, in any case, would have risen over the heads of the leaders of the social democracy. Hilferding attempts to find justification for his betrayal in our criticism, which demands that the Communists take Hilferding's betrayal into account as an accomplished fact.

Although Hilferding has "nothing to add" to Trotsky's words, he nevertheless does add something: the correlation of forces, he says, is such that even in the event of the united action of social democratic and Communist workers, there would be no possibility "by forcing the fight, to overthrow the enemy and to seize power." In this remark, glossed over in passing without any evidence, lies the very crux of the question. According to Hilferding in Germany today, where the proletariat composes the majority of the population and the deciding productive force of society, the united front of the social democracy and the Communist party could not place the power in the hands of the proletariat! When is the precise moment, then, that the power can pass into the hands of the proletariat? Prior to the war there was the perspective of the automatic growth of capitalism, of the growth of the proletariat, and of the equal growth of the social democracy. This process was cut short by the war, and no power in the world will restore it. The decay of capitalism means that the question of power must be decided on the basis of the now existing productive forces. By prolonging the agony of the capitalist régime, the social democracy leads only to the further decline of economic culture, to the disorganization of the proletariat, to social gangrene. No other perspectives lie ahead; tomorrow will be worse than today; the day after tomorrow worse than tomorrow. But the leaders of the social democracy no longer dare to look into the future. Theirs are all the vices of the ruling class doomed to destruction; they are light-minded, their will is paralyzed, they are given to blubbering over events and hoping for miracles. Come to think of it, Tarnow's economic researches fulfill now the same function as did once the consoling revelations of a Rasputin. . . .

The social democrats together with the Communists would not be able to seize power. There he stands, the snobbish, educated, (gebildet) petty bourgeois, an utter coward, soaked from head to foot with distrust and contempt for the masses. The social democracy and the Communist party together hold about 40 per cent of the votes, despite the fact that the betrayals of the social democracy and the mistakes of the C. P. drive millions into the camp of indifference and even National Socialism. Once a fact, the joint action of these two parties alone, by opening before the masses new perspectives, would incommensurably increase the strength of the proletariat. But let us limit ourselves to 40 per cent. Has Bruening perhaps more, or Hitler? But there are only these three groups that can rule Germany: the proletariat, the center party or the Fascists. But a notion is firmly implanted in the heads of the educated petty bourgeois: for the representatives of capital to rule, 20 per cent of the votes suffice, because the bourgeoisie, you see, has the banks, the trusts, the syndicates, the railroads. True, our educated petty bourgeois made ready to "socialize" all these twelve years ago. But enough is too much!

struggle tears away all the covers from the actual relation of forces. During a direct and immediate struggle for power, the proletariat, unless paralyzed by sabotage from within, by Austro-Marxism and by all other forms of betrayal, develops a force incommensurably superior to its parliamentary expression. Let us recall once again the invaluable lessons of history. Even after the Bolsheviks had seized power, and firmly seized it, they had less than one third of the votes in the Constituent Assembly; together with the Left S. R.'s—less than 40 per cent. Yet despite a fearful economic collapse, despite the war, despite the betrayal of the European, and first of all of the German, social democracy, despite the post-war reaction of weariness, despite the growth of Thermidorian tendencies, the first workers' government stands on its feet fourteen years. And what can be said of Germany? At the moment the social democratic worker together with the Communist arises to seize power, the task will be nine-tenths completed.

Nevertheless, says Hilferding, had the social democracy voted against Bruening's government and thereby overthrown it, the consequence would have been the coming of the Fascists to power. That is the way, perhaps, the matter may appear on a parliamentary plane; but the matter itself does not rest on a parliamentary plane. The social democracy could refuse to support Bruening only in the event that it decided to enter upon the road of revolutionary struggle. Either support Bruening, or fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat. No third course is given. The social democracy, by voting against Bruening, would change at once the correlation of forces—not on the parliamentary chess board, whose chess-pieces might surprisingly enough be found underneath the table—but on the arena of the revolutionary struggle of the classes. After such an about-face, the forces of the working class would increase not twofold but tenfold, for in the class struggle, the moral factor holds by no means the last place, particularly during great historical upheavals. Under the impact of this moral force, the masses of the people, one stratum after another, would be charged to the point of highest intensity. The proletariat would say to itself with assurance, that it alone was called to give a different and a higher direction to the life of this great nation. Disintegration and decomposition in Hitler's army would set in before the decisive battles. Battles of course could not be avoided; but with a firm resolution to fight to victory, by attacking boldly, victory might be achieved infinitely more easily than the most extreme revolutionary optimist now imagines.

Only a trifle is lacking for this: the about-face of the social democracy, its taking the road of revolution. To hope for a voluntary shift on the part of the leaders after the experiences of 1914-1922 would be the most ludicrous of all illusions. But the majority of social democratic workers—that is something else again; they can make the turn, and they will make it—it is only necessary to help them. And this turn will be not only against the bourgeois government, but against the upper layers of their own party.

At this point, our Austro-Marxist, who has "nothing to add" to our words, will try once more to bring against us citations from our own books: didn't we write point blank that the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy represent a chain of errors; didn't we stigmatize the participation of the Communist party in the Hitler referendum? We did write, we did stigmatize. But we wage battle with the Stalinist leadership in the Comintern precisely because it is incapable of breaking up the social democracy, of tearing the masses from under its influence, of freeing the locomotive of history from its rusty chain-brake. By its convulsions, its mistakes, its bureaucratic ultimatum, the Stalinist bureaucracy preserves the social democracy, permits it again and again to regain its foothold.

The Communist party is a proletarian, anti-bourgeois party, even if erroneously. The social democracy, though composed of workers, is entirely a bourgeois party, which under "normal conditions" is led quite expertly from the point of view of bourgeois aims, but which is good for nothing at all under the conditions of a social crisis. The leaders of the social democracy are themselves forced to recognize, though unwillingly, the bourgeois character of the party. Referring to the crisis and the unemployment situation, Tarnow mouths moth-eaten phrases about the "disgrace of capitalist civilization", quite in the manner of a protestant minister preaching on the sinfulness of wealth; referring to socialism, Tarnow talks after the manner of this same minister when the latter preaches about rewards beyond the grave; but when it comes to concrete questions, he assumes another tone: "If on September 14th, this spectre (unemployment) had not hovered over the ballot box, this day would have been written differently into the pages of German history. (Report at the Leipzig Congress)." The social democracy lost votes and seats because capitalism, on account of the crisis, had revealed its authentic visage. The crisis did not strengthen the party of "socialism", on the contrary, it weakened it, just as it depressed the trade turn-over, the resources of banks, the self-assurance of Hoover and Ford, the profits of the Prince of Monaco, etc. Today, one is obliged to look, not in bourgeois papers, but in social democratic press for the most optimistic evaluations of the conjuncture. Can more undebatable proofs of the bourgeois character

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