

The Significance of the Russian Revolution For the American Working Class

By A. J. MUSTE

The idea of winning American workers to Communism by showing them or talking to them about the progress of "socialist construction" in the Soviet Union always had its limitations. Of course, the Stalinist propaganda in this connection was always based on a fallacious theory, namely, that socialism could be built within the borders of the Soviet Union alone, if only war could be put off a few years by whatever means. Today "the final, irrevocable victory of socialism in the land of the Soviets" has been achieved according to the Seventh Comintern Congress. Any ideas or hopes based on such a theory, on an illusion, were bound to lead to confusion or disillusionment.

Achievements in the S. U.
Apart from this, it is true that there have been important technical and other achievements in the S. U. and we have every right to say that even the beginnings of a planned socialist economy under a workers' state can do more for the workers, in the face of the greatest obstacles, than capitalism. But even when based on this more sober and correct approach, the demonstration of the economic progress made in the S. U. was not calculated to impress and convince the general run of American workers. They could not visualize the low plane of the pre-war economy in Russia. They could see too plainly that the standard of living, technical development and labor productivity were still exceedingly low, compared to what they saw under their own eyes in the post-war U. S. under the most favorably situated capitalism in the world. They lacked the political development to analyze and understand what they saw.

There was a brief interval at the very close of the Hoover reign when very large numbers of American workers were impressed by the picture of no unemployment, etc. under the Five Year Plan in contrast with the misery, demoralization and vague alarm which pervaded the U. S. in those days, and said: "Pretty soon we'll have to do as they did in Russia." But even then the concept of Russia as the promised land was far more generally accepted among the intellectuals and even some of the agricultural population than among the workers; and the talk about doing as they had done in Russia often expressed a fight from reality rather than any determination to face it. Stalinist publicity seems now intent not so much on showing that things in Russia are superior to what obtains in the U. S. as upon showing that they are much the same in the Soviet Union as in the U. S.

Tell the Story of the Revolution
Yet the Russian revolution was and is of immense significance for American workers. The idea that it is a "Russian" affair, "foreign," something that does not concern us, unless it be as an evil example, is of course false and dangerous. It is furthermore possible, I believe, to get large numbers of American workers to understand something of the significance of the Russian revolution, though it must always be remembered that the average worker is mainly concerned about things very near to home. It is after a new regime has been established in the U. S. also, not before, that his psychology and outlook be genuinely internationalist.

In the first place, the story of the revolutionary crisis itself, the misery and disorganization resulting from the war under the Czarist bureaucracy, the overthrow of the czar, the miserable failure of the bourgeois and non-revolutionary parties to stop the break-up of all economic life, to meet the needs of the masses, the gradual upsurge of the masses and their rise to power,—all this merely as a dramatic spectacle is tremendously impressive. Workers who have been in strikes can live it from the inside. A popular version of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* would be a powerful means for mass propaganda.

Show the Connection with War
The development should be shown in connection with the war. War is the only "way out" that capitalism knows. Permitted to remain in power it will lead the masses every-

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Explanation of Basic Elements of Revolution Will Spur Desire to Emulate It

where, in the U. S. too, to the abyss into which the Russian masses were thrust. Capitalism will stop short of nothing in order to retain its hold. The American workers are not immune, do not live in a universe apart, as they thought in the Coolidge-Hoover era. The depression has dispelled that illusion. There are only two ways to "stop war"—complete exhaustion, the collapse of civilization, or the way the Russian workers chose, the road of revolution which puts an end to capitalism itself.

The idea that finally the workers have to take things into their own hands, that they can trust no one but themselves; the great idea of masses in motion, no longer inert, no longer meekly obeying orders, but standing up in their own right, marching, sweeping everything before them—all this makes a genuine appeal to American workers. On a small scale they have demonstrated in their own strikes that it can be done. Paint the picture of mass action, direct action, on the grand scale in the Russian revolution and they will understand.

Revolution No Tea Party

Show them, too, that the revolution is not a tea party. The masses have to arm themselves in order to escape slaughter at the hands of capitalist henchmen. It is not a question of electing one set of politicians to replace another. A clean break has to be made. The government has to be overthrown. The whole capitalist state and its machinery, police, courts, army must be destroyed. The workers must put their own state, their own revolutionary government, in its place. That is the lesson of the Russian revolution. American workers will come to see this too. There is that in their own tradition which will help them to see it.

The story of the Russian revolution, especially in connection with the contrasting policy pursued and results obtained in Germany and Austria, e.g. is the very best medium for teaching the workers what working class unity is and how it can be obtained. Impatience with

divisions and "wrangling," desire for unity, are deep-seated. But history shows us that all forms of "unity" between workers and other classes on another than working class basis, all forms of "unity" in the working class itself, on anything save a revolutionary program are undependable, a death-trap indeed for the workers. Precisely at the critical moment they break down. They produce not unity, but confusion and division. Genuine unity is achieved on the basis of a revolutionary program and under the leadership of the revolutionary party. There can be and there is no other way—the way of Lenin and Trotsky.

Only the First Battle

The impression conveyed by much of the Stalinist propaganda is that the war of the working class for emancipation basically came to an end with the Russian revolution. It "established" socialism. Henceforth virtually the sole duty of the working class of the world is to "defend the Soviet Union," protect it from external attack, and then pretty much as a matter of course socialism will gain universal sway. This is bad, un-Marxist theory; it is also bad psychology. The Russian revolution resulting in the establishment of the first workers' state in all history, is indeed of incalculable significance. But it was not the war of the workers against their oppressors which came to an end in 1917 on Russian soil. The first major battle of a direct revolutionary character was fought there and the first great victory recorded. But the war is on. Subsequently, the workers have suffered heavy defeats. No matter. The shining example of 1917 stands. The war is still on. Here on American soil also the battle must be fought. Preparing for that battle against American imperialism is the primary duty of the American working class which has also its fighting traditions, a fresh, vigorous class which has never yet suffered a major defeat, but which has also tests to face such as the past never presented. Put the matter thus and Amer-

Increasing Oppression -- Path of Bureaucracy

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is an historical absurdity. It will be swept away together with its organizers.
Fallacy of Individual Attempts
Do we call for the assassination of the Soviet leaders? The bureaucrats who have defied themselves may be sincerely under the delusion that they are making history, but we on our part do not share this illusion. Stalin did not create the apparatus. The apparatus created Stalin—after its own image. The replacement of Kirov by Zhdanov changed absolutely nothing in the state of affairs. Unlike the situation that prevails with goods for mass consumption, the assortment of Kossiors is unlimited. They vary from one another a centimeter or so in height and a few centimeters in girth. That is all! In everything else they are as alike as their own enclaves of Stalin. The replacement of Stalin himself by one of the Kaganovitchs would introduce almost as little novelty as did the replacement of Kirov by Zhdanov. But would a Kaganovitch be sufficient "authority"? There is no cause for worry, all the Kossiors—the first, the fifteenth and the one thousand and first—would immediately provide the necessary authority for him by means of the bureaucratic conveyor, just as they created Stalin's "authority." I.e., "authority" for themselves, for their uncontrolled rule.

The Basis of the Terror

The senseless bestialities, which grew out of bureaucratic methods of collectivization, as well as the vile reprisals and violence against the best elements of the proletariat vanguard inevitable arouse exasperation, hatred and yearning for revenge. This atmosphere engenders moods of individual terrorism amongst the youth. The petty Ukrainian Bonaparte, S. Kossior, famous for his brazenness, said long ago that Trotsky "calls in the press for the assassination of Soviet leaders," while Zinoviev and Kamenev, as proved—if you please by the Yenukidze case—participated directly in the preparation of the Kirov assassination. Since everybody who has access to the writings of Trotsky can easily verify whether or not Trotsky has called for "the assassination of Soviet leaders" (if one were to allow, in general, that there are adult people who have to verify canards of this sort), this itself casts sufficient light upon the other half of Kossior's lie which concerns Zinoviev and Kamenev. We do not know whether there are now in process of manufacture any fraudulent documents with the aid of "Latvian consuls" or "Wrangel officers." The Kossiors of the Bonapartist regime are still able to hound, strangle and shoot quite a number of impeccable revolutionists, but this will not change the essence of the matter: their terror

is an historical absurdity. It will be swept away together with its organizers.

That is why individual terror appears so pathetic and puny in our eyes. No, we have not unlearned the A B C of Marxism. Not only the fate of the Soviet bureaucracy but the fate of the Soviet regime as a whole depends upon factors of a world historic magnitude. Only successes on the part of the international proletariat can restore self-confidence to the Soviet proletariat. The basic condition for revolutionary successes is the unification of the world proletariat vanguard around the banner of the Fourth International. The struggle for this banner must be waged in the U.S.S.R. as well; prudently but unyieldingly. The historical absurdity of an autocratic bureaucracy in a "classless" society cannot and will not endlessly endure. The proletariat that has achieved three revolutions will once again lift up its head. But won't the bureaucratic "absurdity" resist? The proletariat will find a large enough broom. And we shall assist them. September 6, 1935

The Figure of Trotsky

And it is through the medium of the life, the activities, the sayings of Lenin and Trotsky that the conceptions of revolutionary internationalism must in large measure be made real and living to American workers. A pamphlet of the most popular character on the life of Trotsky is one of our immediate needs for the broadest mass work. A popular book on the same subject is needed for those who have time and aptitude for more extensive reading. The conception that the figure of Trotsky, the chief organizer of the revolt in Petrograd during those "ten days that shook the world," organizer of the Red Army, first army in all history under the control of the workers; bearer of the banner of revolutionary internationalism, the banner of world-revolution, in the face of bitter and colossal persecution—the conception that this symbolic figure must be kept in the background is not sound. He belongs to the Russian Revolution, to the Soviet State though not to the Soviet bureaucracy under Stalinist domination. He belongs to China also, to Germany, to France to Latin America. He belongs to the working class and to the revolutionary party, the Workers Party, in the United States. Even Stalinist defamation will in the long run make clear rather than obscure that fact.

The American workers were deeply stirred by the Russian events of 1917, as those of us who were old enough at that time can well remember. The American workers are much nearer not only in point of time but with respect to the development of economy under which they live, and in point of their own political development—much nearer now to facing such a crisis as the Russia masses encountered eighteen years ago. As the capitalist crisis, including the war crisis, swiftly develops, so will the American workers rapidly develop a greater interest in the Russian revolution; come to know it as "their" revolution also, the first mighty victory in the world-revolution which will not be stopped until the working class has everywhere established its rule and humanity can advance to a new stage of civilization in comparison with which the highest that has so far been achieved will appear cheap and barbaric.

Green Trains Guns on Fighting Mpls. Labor

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of the United Textile Workers. This strike is of national significance. The struck Strutwear plant was endangering the national existence of the union. Running at top speed, in three shifts, the open-shop Strutwear plant was flooding the East with sweatshop-priced goods. Previous attempts to unionize the plant had met with no success, the weak forces of the Central Labor Union being impotent to aid the hosiery federation. The rise to power of Local 574 gave the hosiery federation its long-sought opportunity.

Despite the fact that only a handful at first answered the strike call, the hosiery union's appeal to Local 574 resulted in the shut-down of the plant in August and it has remained closed since, despite numerous attacks by the police on the picket lines. Vincent Dunne, leader of Local 574, received three broken ribs at the hands of police and a sentence of fifteen days in the workhouse for his picketing activities in behalf of the Strutwear strikers. The local press announces the formation of vigilante gangs to war on strike leaders and the employers are hysterically demanding that the police reopen the plant. But the hardy pickets of 574 intend to keep the plant shut until it signs up with the American Federation of Hosiery Workers.

Other Services of 574

In addition to these strikes, Local 574 has aided numerous others, including the Arrowhead steel strike, the Minneapolis-St. Paul mechanics' strike of last January, the Fargo drivers' strike and the building-trades strike. In the last two weeks hitherto unorganized workers in the candy industry and chicken pickers came to the headquarters of 574 for aid in organizing unions, and won immediate success.

The example of what the militant leadership of Local 574 has been able to do for the workers of Minneapolis has driven the local bureaucrats into a frenzy of hatred. All attempts of local talent to destroy Local 574 having failed, the national union-busters, Green, Woll and Co. have now been called in.

The capitalist press and radio, which commented approvingly on former New York police commissioner Richard Enright's recent declaration here calling for violence against the "reds and other lawless elements" will undoubtedly support Bill Green's assault on the unions, as will the employers' open-shop organization, the Citizens Alliance. Farmer-Labor Mayor Latimer, who recently went to Washington to appeal to Green to help him against the unions, declaring that "Progress

has been and is being endangered by industrial strife," undoubtedly assured Green of all possible support. The "employer-employee" committee for "industrial peace," set up by Mayor Latimer, composed of President Cunningham of the State Federation of Labor, two other conservative trade union officials, a "neutral" member who is head of a local bosses' industrial institute, and three open-shop bosses—a vice-president of the local Manufacturing Association, and the managers of the non-union Northern States Power Company and the General Mills—will undoubtedly also support Green.

Labor Cold to States' Appeal

But Green will have to look far and wide for support from the labor movement.

Only two weeks ago a delegated conference of fifteen local unions met in the machinists' headquarters and voted to send resolutions to Tobin, Green, the State Federation and the Central Labor Union, demanding reinstatement of Local 574 as essential to the welfare of all local unions.

Local 574 sits on a joint council with the unions of the filling-station attendants and the automobile mechanics.

The organizer of the Central Labor Union comes to 574's hall to appeal for help on the picket lines. The "women's clubs" to whom Green's representative announces he will appeal, certainly will not include the most powerful of all, the Farmer-Labor Women's Federation, which, immediately after the attack on the ornamental iron workers' picket lines, held a mass meeting and denounced Mayor Latimer as a murderer.

The "veterans' organizations" will not include the Farmer-Labor Veterans Association, which joined the women's federation in demanding the expulsion from the party of Mayor Latimer.

Nor will Green get much help from the Farmer-Labor Hennepin (Minneapolis) County central committee delegates, who cursed their elected representatives for using the police against the strikers.

Nor will Green get much help from the many Farmer-Laborite aldermen and state representatives who called for Latimer's expulsion from the party and his recall from office.

Green, Woll and Tobin are undoubtedly assured of one thing—they have picked out the toughest place in the country for their union-busting.

SUPPORT THE NEW MILITANT SUBSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN.

Long Live the Russian Revolution

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ment of the social crisis!

The Russian workers inherited from Czarism a poorly developed industry. And even that was ruined and disorganized, first by the ravages of the disastrous war of the capitalist powers and then by the civil war and the intervention. The success of the Soviet workers, deprived of all aid from the capitalist world, in reconstructing the shattered basis of pre-war Russian industry and then in expanding it on a scale and at a pace unprecedented in history, has proven for all time the immense superiority of the Soviet system over the capitalist system of private ownership. That which the Marxists always maintained has been irrefutably confirmed in practice under the most unfavorable conditions by the Soviet proletariat. The productive forces of mankind, fettered by capitalist property relations and disorganized by ever-deepening crises, will be again vastly expanded under the socialist world system. All possible doubts on this score are removed by the achievements of the Russian revolution in the field of industry regardless of eventual fate of the present Soviet state.

The true adherents of the Russian revolution do not blind themselves to its weaknesses which are fundamentally the result of its isolation and capitalist encirclement and inseparable from it. The nationalist degeneration, which has proceeded uninterruptedly since Lenin's death and which expresses the pressure of alien classes at home and abroad, is the greatest menace to the Soviet Union and the most formidable obstacle to the extension of the revolution to other lands. Stalinism, the bearer of this nationalist degeneration, is the mortal enemy of the Soviet Union and the international revolution. He who does not see this and say it frankly is no revolutionist. Our attitude has nothing in common with those dubious "Friends of the Soviet Union" who expose their friendship in servile and uncritical support of every act and every crime of the bureaucracy. Such people, who are at best sentimental philistines serving reactionary ends and at worst wretched careerists and hired flunkies of the opulent bureaucracy, are outside the revolution and, at the critical moment, will turn up on the sidelines or on the other side of the barricades. As for us, the Russian revolution is our own. We owe the Soviet Union our criticism which is inseparable from the real and unconditional support which genuine revolutionists have always given it. Our fight against Stalinism is a fight for the real defense of the Soviet Union and its extension throughout the world.

The October revolution and the Third International of Lenin are forever united in his-

tory as one and the same enterprise. The ideas of the Third International, forged by Lenin and his collaborators in the darkest days of the world war, came to fruition in the October revolution and made it possible. And by the same token the consolidation of the victory in Russia gave the impulse to the world movement which called the Third International into existence as a world organization. Revolutionary internationalism was the guiding idea which gave meaning to the struggle and determined its course throughout. The abandonment of this line by the nationalistic usurpers has worked exclusively to weaken and undermine the Soviet Union, to destroy the Third International and to demoralize the proletarian vanguard throughout the world. But for the revolutionary Marxists who remain true to themselves the betrayal of the usurpers is only a summons to conduct a new struggle for the old cause. The downfall of the Third International sounds the call for the creation of the Fourth.

The teaching and practice of the leaders of the Russian Revolution and the Third International, brilliantly exemplified in the greatest victory the working class has ever known, retain all their validity today. To be true to these teachings and apply them—therein lies the task of the proletarian vanguard and the assurance of its victory. To that task we dedicate ourselves again on the 18th anniversary of the Russian revolution.

In order to go forward we must return to Lenin. We must raise again the banner of revolutionary internationalism. We must revive the concept of the Russian revolution as the beginning of the international revolution and dependent on it. That is the way, and the only way, to defend the Soviet Union, to fight the impending war of the imperialists and to prepare the way for the world October. All these tasks and problems which dominate and determine the fate of the working class and of all humanity are bound together today in a single slogan: **THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL!**

Toledo and Minneapolis

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News-Bee editors would have their Minneapolis conferees believe,—or it is necessary to refer them to their own back-files on the General Milk Drivers, FEBA, Chevrolet and a dozen other militant battles.

The first wave of labor struggle in Toledo is ended, the flood that started two years ago with the "Battle of Chestnut Hill." Labor here is utilizing the present lull in strike activity, similar to that throughout the country, to entrench itself in its new won positions and to lay the groundwork for more and greater battles to come. The organization of the Labor Political Congress, while in itself an ineffective agency for genuine working class political action, is an indication of the breaking away of Toledo workers from old-line capitalist party loyalties and a desire for class action.

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