

By Dwight Macdonald

SPARKS IN THE NEWS

The Old Misleader

Some one remarked to me the other day that for a long time he had thought the tone which Bolshevik revolutionaries used towards the reformists was much too sharp and melodramatic. Recently, however, he has come to see that every epithet, every "hangman of the workingclass!", every "lackey of capitalism!" was and is justified, that it would be almost impossible to paint in too black colors the treachery and cowardice of groups like the Social Democratic Federation. The closer American capitalism draws to its supreme crisis of war and fascism, the more implacably anti-revolutionary become the reformists.

The working of this process can be seen easily if one has followed, as I have, the last year of the S.D.F. organ, *The New Leader*. As the war draws near, this journal has taken on an ever-increasing similarity to the jingoistic, chauvinist "socialist" sheets of the Europe of 1914. The one difference is all in their favor: they at least waited until the war had actually broken out before dropping the "socialist" mask and appearing frankly as recruiting agents for the bourgeois war machines.

But *The Old Misleader* isn't waiting for M-Day to dish out what Engels was vulgar enough to call "the old crap." Week after week, its front page is black with scare heads about the inroads that fascism is making in Peru and the heroic defense measures of brave little Poland, the current workers' fatherland. This week's glad tidings for the American working class is the front-page head: POLISH CAVALRY CAPABLE OF ROUTING MOTORIZED NAZIS.

F.D.R. Removes the Fig Leaf

When it comes to domestic news, *The Old Misleader* is, just now, in a really pathetic position, as are its comrades in arms, *The Nation*, *The Daily Worker*, and *The CIO News*. It is getting increasingly harder to kid the masses about their friend in the White House when he publicly congratulates Congress on removing the prevailing wage provision from this year's WPA act, when he denounces the WPA strikers and loses his G-men on them, and when he appoints to head the Social Security Board the quasi-fascist machine politician Paul McNutt.

And so a hasty glance at *The Old Misleader* fails to indicate there's a WPA strike on at all. Its issue of July 15, at the height of the whole business, relegates the strike to less than a column on page two. (This story, incidentally, is a masterpiece of falsification. By carefully mixing up two entirely separate sections of the WPA bill—the one nullifying the prevailing wage clause, and the one forbidding regional differences in wage rates—the author is able to write: "Although the Administration opposed abolition of the differentials, the President has announced that his Administration will attempt to carry out the new provisions of the law." Actually, of course, the President favors the abolition of the first (or pre-

vailing wage) "differential," and is opposed only to the abolition of the regional wage differential.

The only other reference in the whole eight pages to the ticklish subject is a cut-and-dried little notice in a corner of page eight, headed in small type: "S.D.F. Scores WPA Cuts."

The banner headline on page one is: ANTI-AXIS FORCES ANGERED BY U. S. "NEUTRALITY," with the subhead, amazing even in this cloud-cuckoo land: OLDER GERMANS, EMBITTERED BY CONGRESS ACTION, TURN TO HITLER. It seems that Jack Sanford, the *Misleader's* enterprising correspondent in France, performed a remarkable journalistic feat. As soon as he received the news that Congress had refused to revise the Neutrality Act, he at once took a Gallup Poll of the eighty million citizens of Germany to see how they felt about it. He is, naturally, somewhat excited about his findings, as, evidently, were the editors. "The psychological effects," he hints darkly, "may be incalculable." And then for the real news scoop: "I learn already that it has thrown masses of the elder generation of neutral Germans into the Nazi camp." That hitherto unchallenged mass psychoanalyst, Walter Durranty, had better look to his laurels!

Those Terrible Trotskyites!

On this same front page there is another story which deserves a few words: TROTSKYITE 'GUARDS' DRIVE AIDS COUGHLIN. This is a very snooty little piece, very superior indeed—the tiny Socialist Workers Party, "the obscure Trotskyite newspaper, *The Socialist Appeal*," etc. Specifically, the *Misleader* is sore because Comrade Milton's proposal that his local of the ILGWU form a Workers Anti-Fascist Defense Guard gave Father Coughlin a chance to attack the ILGWU and to wound the tender sensibilities of that shrinking violet, David Dubinsky.

When it comes to more general criticism, the usual Stalinist objections are raised. (It is interesting how indistinguishable on all major matters are the lines of the S.D.F. and the C.P.) Such guards "provoke violence." They are "illegal." There is "strong public opinion against private armies." And, above all, what's wrong with the police as protection for workers' meetings against the Coughlinites?

All of these arguments, except the one about illegality (which is news to me), would apply to any strike. But the workers would be foolish to listen to any such line. Despite the danger of provoking violence, despite the undoubtedly strong public opinion against the use of force by pickets, and despite the splendid protection offered by the forces of law and order, the strikers must nevertheless, however reluctantly and with however heavy hearts, wreak violence on the persons of any scabs in the neighborhood. Any one who has been on a picket line knows this, and any one who has seen LaGuardia's cops "protecting" anti-fascist meetings or has had a glimpse of the Social Justice goon squad in action knows why Workers Guards are necessary.

MEN AND WOMEN OF LABOR

OUT OF THE PAST

By EMANUEL GARRETT

THORSTEIN VEBLEN*

(July 30, 1857—August 3, 1929)

Thorstein Veblen, a radical intellectual who stood aloof from the class struggle, was yet the sarcastic author of some of the most effective attacks on the profit system and perhaps America's most original thinker in his generation.

Born on a Wisconsin farm, of Norwegian immigrant parents, Veblen spent most of his life, except when unemployed and living off the old folks, in colleges, studying, teaching, writing. The college authorities never liked to have him around, because they thought his ideas as well as his life not respectable, though he brought a certain fame to the college. Most of his students didn't like him because they didn't understand him. The "public" never knew whether his books were serious or not.

Veblen's books, however, were his real contribution to the labor movement. In a pendantic tone, using six long Latinized words instead of one short one, he solemnly ridiculed the stuffed shirts of America, the business men, so skillfully that they never got the point. The implications of every one of his books were revolutionary, but they remained only sarcastic implications.

A careful student of Marx, Veblen did much to explode the criticisms of bourgeois economists. He showed that the labor theory of value, so mightily belabored by the critics, was self-evident as expressed by Marx. His *The Socialist Economics of Karl Marx*, is a brilliant outline of Capital. But Veblen rejected the law of capitalist accumulation because, writing in 1906, he could not see what follows from that law, the constant growth of the "reserve army of labor" (the unemployed) and the increasing misery of the workers. Had he written in 1939, so honest an observer could not have failed to see the predictions borne out. Veblen made mince-meat of the "Marxist" revisionists like Bernstein, but he seemed at this time not to read the work of Lenin or Luxemburg.

Veblen's System Fragmentary

Veblen wrote no book that contains his whole system of thought. The reader has to pick it up from side remarks and sly comments. But from these remarks, in such books as *The Instinct of Workmanship*, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, and *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, one can see the outline: the common man, the worker, works for perfection. But the business man, who is interested not in industrial production but in profits, practises a "conscientious withdrawal of productive efficiency" (Veblenese for sabotage) which kills

*This column on Thorstein Veblen was contributed by Bruno Johnson.

the "instinct of workmanship". The higher learning in America is managed for the exclusive benefit of the business men; law and politics are mere cloaks for the "predatory" interests; patriotism and business, useless to the whole community, are the chief barriers to peace; and the vested interests ("a marketable right to get something for nothing") control our lives. Germany became a great power by imitating England's industrial technique but not her "democratic" ideas and politics: the feudal-military absolutism of Germany fitted far better with the realities of capitalism; here Veblen gives an interesting premonition, if not a prediction, of the necessity of a Hitler to maintain capitalism. Almost parallel with Lenin, Veblen pointed out the relentless growth of monopoly capital toward a world of war and the strangling of the common man, or else—

Defended Bolshevik Revolution

Veblen made only tentative stabs at the class struggle: as editor of *The Dial* he defended the Bolshevik Revolution, signed protests against the trial of the 101 Wobblies in Chicago, and denounced the Palmer Red Raids as the dementia praecox of rotting capitalism. And in one of his last books, *The Engineers and the Price System*, he sketched a new plan for revolution, the formation of soviets of engineers and technicians who are the real bottleneck of production and who are irked by the sabotage of big business. He even helped to form the nucleus of such a soviet, the Technical Alliance; but lacking organizing ability and misunderstanding the nature of the class struggle, he failed.

In his earliest and greatest book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen dissects capitalist culture and finds it rotten. The literary lights who loved and quoted the book for its satire on a money-culture missed the revolutionary implications: the only way to create a true culture is to wipe out capitalism. Veblen's irony shows the roots of art and the social graces under capitalism as merely the desire for "conspicuous waste" and "conspicuous leisure" (i.e., showing off money). The rich man's "pecuniary reputation" demands that styles change before clothes wear out, that useless servants clutter up a useless estate, that only costly things can be considered beautiful, that education be classical, useless, and good only to prove that the rich man did not have to work for a living while acquiring the "ceremonial utility" of his manners.

It is typical of this detached, ironic, scholarly genius that his last work was the translation of an old Norse saga. Yet the revolutionary movement in America must always acknowledge its debt to Thorstein Veblen for his savage analysis of the rottenness of our society.

An Appeal for International Solidarity Against the Repressions in France

As we have many times reported in the *Appeal*, the Daladier regime in France has been regularly persecuting revolutionary militants who have been opposing the government's war preparations. From the International Commission of the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party (P.S.O.P.) we have received news of additional persecutions. Below we print their letter in full. The Cherbourg incident that is mentioned in the letter refers to an agitation that the P.S.O.P. conducted among the soldiers stationed at Cherbourg in protest against the arbitrary extension of the military service period beyond two years.

Dear Comrades,

We inform you that today, July 25, an investigation of several hours took place at our party local, 42 Rue Rochecouart. Three investigating commissions officially investigated the following questions: 1) the anti-militarist leaflets (sequel to the Cherbourg affair of May last, details of which you have already read in *June '36*, official weekly organ of the P.S.O.P.). We must remind you, to be used in whatever way you can, that Marceau Pivert is being prosecuted for this as the political director of our party. 2) La Caserne, anti-militarist journal but completely unconnected with our party and for which it is in no way responsible. 3) La Jeune Garde (The Young Guard—youth publication) July-August number, for its anti-militarism (you will receive under separate cover a copy of this number which was today again confiscated).

Organize Protest Meetings

We have been informed that two warrants of arrest have been issued by the police against Comrade Poulain, member of the fifth section of the Paris P.S.O.P., 36 years of age, with sixty years of activity in proletarian parties behind him. The warrant has been issued against him in his capacity of manager for the party of La Jeune Garde; he has already been arrested. Also another warrant has been issued against comrade Lucien Weitz, political secretary of the P.S.O.P. youth and a member of the Central Committee of our party in his capacity as secretary of the P.S.O.P. youth; Comrade Weitz had given in preceding numbers of *La Jeune Garde* information on the Schmidt-Steve-Rigal-Polle affair with which you are acquainted. At the time of writing we do not know if Weitz has been detained.

Following these events, the

Bureau of the Party decided to instruct its locals to hold public meetings on the 30th of this month to protest against police abuses and the government repression which is striking more and more at the militant comrades and the revolutionary press. On this occasion our party will affirm its firm determination to continue its anti-militarist and revolutionary activities in spite of repression. A special edition of *June '36* will appear also on Friday next on this question.

International Solidarity

You doubtless understand the significance of this repression which seeks to stifle resistance to war and the sacred union. We therefore expect from you

that, without delay, and by means that you will judge appropriate (press demonstrations, meetings, etc.) you will organize active solidarity with our movement which is in the heat of the struggle against the imperialist war. Above all do not delay to send us immediately the next number of your publication in which you will publish an article on this question, an article that we will welcome, followed by an appeal in favor of the persecuted anti-militarists and giving support to our struggle.

For the International Commission of the P.S.O.P.,

Marie Guerin.

July 25, 1939

Mass Action by Negro Workers Brings Victory

(Continued from Page 1)

Judge Lupe, was just another attempt to throw a monkey wrench into attempts of the Negro workers to get better housing.

Negro housing on Chicago's South Side is the nation's worst. White chauvinism forces the Negroes to live in a real ghetto, within the boundaries of the notorious "iron ring." Unable to move, they are exploited unmercifully by big real estate companies which exact exorbitant rents for the vilest kind of housing facilities. Repairs are the exception and not the rule. It is not uncommon for a family of 12 to be crowded into 2 small rooms, infested with vermin and rats, with no private toilet facilities.

Sunday's demonstration marked a high spot in the long fight of the Negro workers for decent living facilities. The prompt withdrawal of the injunction was a victory obtained by militant mass action, and it served to show the Negro workers all through the South Side the power of organized working class action to attain their demands.

Solidarity of Negro and white workers was demonstrated by the members of the Socialist Workers Party and the Young People's Socialist League, who participated in the demonstration and in the parade organized by the Washington Park Forum, spearhead in the Negro worker's fight for improved housing in Chicago.

Fisher Body Strikers Eager To Carry Fight Through to End

(Continued from Page 1)

Screaming editorials in all the capitalist papers call for "law and order", presumably meaning the riding down of helpless women and children, the trampling, clubbing, shooting and gassing of unarmed peaceful workers exercising their rights to strike and picket. The strike leaders, many of them under the influence of the Stalinists, have weakened and are telling the workers to obey the "law"—that is, the arbitrary ruling of a mayor whom these same strike leaders have denounced as a paid tool of the corporations, the Chamber of Commerce and of a boss-ruled court.

Lesson for Workers

Once again for all the workers to see is the fact that when the workers really unite their forces and fearlessly resort to mass action on the streets, no power or agencies of the bosses and their government can beat them down. But when they submit to the treachery of legality and boss made laws, they are licked in advance.

The lessons of the "Battle of E. 140th Street", are imperishably graven into the minds of all the auto workers here. They are full of fight, and the rank and file is more than anxious to

complete a job well started. Only the most insistent and persistent pleading by the leadership has so far prevented the workers from again taking to the streets in mass fighting formation. One word of assent from the leaders, and the auto workers would swarm out of the other plants as they did last Monday and make confetti out of all the "riot zone" ordinances and injunctions which the bosses are waving in the workers' faces.

Dangerous Precedent

A most dangerous precedent for future strikes has been set by the acceptance of these legal traps by the union leaders. It is to be expected that in the future battles, which are bound to come, the city officials and corporations will crack down on every strike with every imaginable legal restriction, particularly those against mass picketing. The only way to win a strike is to shut the work down cold; that means mass picketing, the only successful weapon against the bosses and strike-breakers.

Join the Socialist Workers Party

Who's Against the War Referendum?

Roosevelt Gives the Whole Show Away

By HAL DRAPER

What are the arguments against giving the people the right to vote on war?

In January of last year, the Ludlow resolution was before Congress, and there was a danger—not so much that it would get to be discussed. In this critical hour, Sergeant Roosevelt went over the top and threw a bomb-shell into the laps of Congress, denouncing the proposal. Its leading idea was:

"Such an amendment as that proposed would cripple any President in his conduct of our foreign relations, and it would encourage other nations to believe that they could violate American rights with impunity."

A Lesson from History

1. Cripple the President's autocratic control over American foreign affairs? Any one who knows the lessons of history will say: Good thing! It was President Polk's use of his executive powers which brought

on the war with Mexico in 1846 without any consultation even with Congress. It was President McKinley's control over foreign relations which permitted him to go before Congress and call for war with Spain while concealing the fact that Spain had granted the U. S. demands. Wilson's secret negotiations with England in 1916 are even better known. History tells us: the President's control over foreign relations has been instrumental in getting us into imperialist wars—behind the backs of the people!

2. Just why would the war referendum cripple the President's conduct of foreign relations? Roosevelt has sworn up and down the land that he is innocent of any intention of throwing the U. S. into war. The proposal which he denounces bears only on the power of making war. All measures short of war would still be (unfortunately) left in his hands. Either, or: Either Roosevelt is a hypocrite when he protests

New York Public School System Crippled by Cuts

By BRUNO JOHNSON

The New York City Board of Education on Thursday, July 27, adopted a budget crippling the whole public school system for the coming year. The crippling began when LaGuardia's Board of Estimate cut \$3,000,000 from the appropriations and the New York State Legislature cut \$5,300,000 more from state aid to the city.

The \$8,300,000 deficit thus acquired has been "absorbed" by the Board of Education in the following ways: classes, already overcrowded, will be enlarged or not decreased; evening elementary schools, serving 30,000 adults yearly, will be dropped from the school system; evening high schools will be limited to students working for Regents' credit. Day classes for adults in English and citizenship are to go. Community and recreation centers, as well as after-school athletic centers, will be closed completely. Thus 75,000 students will be tossed out of school, and the 2,500,000 people who have been using the community centers are locked out.

Lehman's Role

The American Labor Party supported Governor Lehman, instead of fighting the issues on its merits, took shelter behind the unconstitutionality of the budget passed by the legislature: when the budget was thrown out of courts the legislature in special session passed another, differing from the first only in being in accordance with the state constitution, and Lehman said not a word. The same vicious slashes in the school system remained.

COUGHLINITES BRAG ABOUT FASCIST PREPARATIONS

(Continued from Page 1) taunted the Jews to dare to hold a counter-meeting.

At the end of the meeting the chairman held up a huge placard, reading "Buy Christian." He announced to the audience that this corner was now under the control of the Coughlinites, and that they would hold meetings there every Wednesday night. Twenty-six uniformed cops and others in plain clothes guarded the meeting, ready and willing to give the fascists full protection.

When a worker here and there in the crowd voiced objection to the anti-Semitic and anti-labor tirades, police pulled them out of the crowd and into a taxi cab.

Discussion groups which formed afterward in a nearby park decided that something should and would be done. The proposal to build Workers Defense Guards met with approval of those present, even two Communist Party members admitting that action and not words would be needed to defend the neighborhood against the fascist gangs. The youths present, about fifty, all between the ages of 18 and 25, decided that they would meet at an appointed place next Wednesday evening, make the rounds of the local clubs to secure aid, and then gather to demonstrate their opposition to the Coughlin gangsters.

When one of the Teachers Union leaders did criticize the Mayor for sending his office-boy to vote ruin to the schools, the union spokesman deplored the Mayor's "hate" and said that though a progressive, he had "yielded to pressure." Just why a progressive cannot yield to progressive pressure is left unexplained.

All the workers of New York City must remember the fight on education as an essential factor in this fall's elections to the City Council.

One purpose of Big Money's obedient servants in Albany is not yet achieved. They are trying to frighten the public by showing what the schools would suffer unless the teachers took a cut.

The New York City Board of Education tried its best. It dug up the ancient dodge of "voluntary" salary cuts, ranging from 2% to 5½%, the joker being that the younger and poorer-paid teachers, whose salaries would be cut less, would not receive any yearly increments either, and so would actually be cut by 9%, while the highly-paid fat-cats, the superintendents and politicians in the system, would be cut only 4 to 5½%. This proposal was so nearly identical to the bills in Albany that the parents' associations smelled the rat and were not impressed, in spite of the pious wails of the reactionaries about "saving the kindergartens."

Mayor LaGuardia tangled up the mess still further with a marvelously skillful piece of demagoguery: he promised to insure the continuation of all vital educational services without cutting teachers' salaries. The Stalinist-controlled Teachers Union whooped for joy and congratulated the Mayor. That the Mayor's statement was only political tripe was clearly shown when his law-secretary, appointed for one day to the Board of Education in order to make up a quorum, voted for the school-wrecking budget.

In answer to protests, LaGuardia passed the buck again: he laid all the blame on the legislature for cutting \$5,300,000 from state aid to the city, conveniently forgetting his own chicken-feed cut of three million.

Teachers Union Hog-tied

The Teachers Union, because of its Stalinist line, has had one hand tied to its back throughout the fight. Time and again the anti-Stalinist progressives in the union have brought up motions to put pressure on LaGuardia as well as on Albany. Always these proposals were either howled down or passed with sneers about "Tammany politics" and then forgotten. The Stalinists are playing the game of collaborating with boss politicians for this fall's and 1940's elections, and will not offend the "progressive" Little Flower in City Hall. Also, in their desperate zeal to remove the "red" label from the union, they lay off any kind of militant action or picket line. They did the best they could, with half a million leaflets and hundreds of telegrams (but very few to LaGuardia). Yet the time has passed when a legislator will pay any attention to telegrams.

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No Confidence

The bosses' government in Washington wants the "right" to hold the threat of war over the heads of its imperialist rivals, and the "right" to go into such a war, when it becomes necessary, without the consent of the people.

The answer to Roosevelt is: Your very opposition to the war referendum shows why we have no confidence in you or your government. Let the people decide! They are the ones who will have to fight and die!