

# The I. W. W. and Bolshevism

By John Reed

THE May number of *One Big Union*, the I. W. W. monthly magazine, contains a number of surprising statements about Bolshevism, and the Bolsheviks, which show a complete misconception of the revolutionary Socialism and of what has happened in Russia.

For example, this:

"They (the Bolsheviks), captured the Government by force and put Bolsheviks into office in place of the officials of the old regime. The typical Bolshevik revolution is a political revolution by force. The exterior changes they make in the Government may be ever so conspicuous, but still they are not fundamental. These changes all fall within the outlines of the institution we call 'the state.'"

This is just what Bolshevik revolutions do not do—they do not merely "put Bolsheviks into office in place of the officials of the old regime." Their chief peculiarity—the essence of Bolshevism—lies in the fact that they hold, with Marx, that "the proletariat cannot lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and use it for its own purposes." They must destroy the capitalist state, and in order to eradicate it permanently—to destroy its roots—they must set up temporarily a Proletarian Dictatorship, to clear the path for the Industrial Commonwealth which is the aim of the I. W. W. The nature of the new "state" is entirely different from the old one. Its purpose is to abolish the private ownership of the means of production and distribution. How then can anyone say that the "changes" are not "fundamental?" Does not the I. W. W. hold that the capitalist state is merely the instrument by which the capitalist ownership of property is perpetuated and strengthened? Is not the proletarian conquest and destruction of the state a "fundamental change?"

It appears that the I. W. W. is still enamored of the idea that it can organize the workers 100% under capitalism. Apparently the Fellow Workers believe, in spite of what is happening to them now, that they can build up their "new society within the shell of the old" in the teeth of a hostile government. Can't they yet see that by some means the capitalist State must be destroyed, to make way for the building up of their new society?

Marxian Socialism demonstrates that the state—i. e. the institutions and class distinctions of society—are dictated by economic conditions; in other words, the capitalist state is the expression of the property relations of modern society. In order to alter these property relations, some power of the workers must be set up. When private property is abolished, the new economic conditions will give

birth to the new social order, and the state will automatically cease to exist.

An illustration of this is to be seen in the new form of strikes—Seattle, Butte, Winnipeg—where the workers in control of industry find themselves threatened by the capitalist state, and are themselves compelled to set up their own rudimentary government, which undertakes policing, feeding, etc. This is Proletarian Dictatorship in embryo.

But the writer in *One Big Union* seems to believe that the Bolsheviks intend that the Proletarian Dictatorship shall endure indefinitely. This, in the face of constant reiteration of Lenin and other Bolshevik spokesmen, that as soon as capitalism is destroyed the Proletarian Dictatorship also vanishes, and gives way to the Industrial Order! How, in this day, after all the lessons of the Russian Revolution, can anyone be so ignorant as to talk this Anarcho-Menshevik twaddle!

Again we quote:

The Bolshevik revolution is the culmination of political socialism. The program of political socialism is a very general one. It is "the abolition of classes," "the abolition of capitalism," "the socialization of the means of production," "the establishment of a socialist republic," etc., expressions which we ourselves use. But the program of the political socialists is not well worked out on these most important points. They have left the details to chance at the last moment. As a consequence they find themselves without the proper industrial organs for taking over production, at the moment when they have captured political power. The Russians made a hasty experiment with soviets, but as late news inform us, these organs were unequal to the task of taking over production and distribution. The scheme is falling apart, and as a result Russia is partly returning to private ownership and control, partly turning over the work to the co-operative movement, partly resorting to direct government control, only a small part of production and distribution apparently being in control of the workers direct through their industrial organization, as we would have it. In short, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia has not resulted in Industrial Democracy, but in a makeshift or temporary arrangement without stability, without any pretense of a final solution. The limitations of political socialism have become plainly discernible. There are various other movements in Russia, each with their economic programs, but none of them would, as far as we can see, result in Industrial Democracy. With the experience of Bolshevism in Russia, we can again upon a basis of tangible facts reiterate our standpoint which we have so persistently repeated in years gone by, namely, that economic reconstruction of society cannot be accomplished by a government trying to order things with a high hand through laws and regulations, but has to be an organic growth from the bottom, through the industrial organization of the workers at the place of work. Russia will yet have to tackle the immense task of organizing the workers industrially, in order to obtain the necessary organs for taking over production.

"Had the political Socialists not been so persistent in

ignoring industrial organization, had they not insisted on monopolizing the thought of the workers for their parliamentary schemes, the workers of their countries would not now be in such a terrible plight; they would not now be standing helpless, but would be able to carry on production without interruption."

Let us admit at the outset that there is a great deal of truth in the general accusation. It is valid to say that the Socialists generally have paid only too little attention to organizing on the industrial field, so that the workers can take over production. We will admit that we American Socialists have a great deal to learn from the I. W. W.; but the Russian Bolsheviks have not.

The writer says, "The Russians made a hasty experiment with Soviets..." He apparently thinks that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies were organs created to take over production. After a year of almost incessant explanation about the Soviets and their functions, this Fellow Worker seems not to know that the Soviets are political organs, and have nothing to do with the management of production, which is left to the Councils of Workers' Control, based upon the Industrial Unions (of which five at least have adopted the I. W. W. preamble intact) and upon the Factory Shop Committees—Syndicalist organizations springing from the rank and file of the workers.

Already within the shell of the Soviet Government is being created (with the help and encouragement of the Government itself) the new Industrial Society. This consists of the Unions, the Councils of Workers' Control, the Peasants' Agricultural Committees, and is united in one central body, the Supreme Council of People's Economy—the frame-work of the pure Industrial Commonwealth, toward which, as Lenin points out, the Russian Revolution is irresistibly moving.

The writer points out that the organs of the Soviet Government "as late news inform us... were unequal to the task of taking over production and distribution." In the first place, where does the Fellow-worker get his "late news"? From the capitalist press? And in the second place, does he really imagine that Russian industry is backward because the Russian workers were unequal to the task of taking over production? Russian industry, he should know, was wrecked by the War—by the Tsarist and the Kerensky Governments; it was a bankrupt industry which the Bolsheviks took over. And since that time does he not understand that there has been war—both civil and foreign war—a desperate war of defense by a people starving and exhausted? Read the report recently published in *THE COMMUNIST*, entitled, "The Productivity of Russian Labor", by the Acting Commissar of Labor, and then say that the Russian workers' organizations were unfit to manage industry—with most of their fuel cut off, with most of their raw materials lacking, with decrepit machinery unrenewed for more than three years! And by the way, after years of propaganda in a politically democratic country, how large a section of the American working class has the I. W. W. organized?

The Fellow-Worker blames the Bolsheviks for not having built up the workers' economic organizations properly years before. Does he not know that all Unions were illegal under the Tsar, that propaganda and organization in Russia up to 1917 were punished most cruelly, that the workers were deliberately kept in the blackest ignorance? How could the Bolsheviks build up labor organizations before the Revolution?

But when the Revolution finally broke, it was the Bolsheviks who encouraged and forced labor organization. It was the Bolsheviks who introduced a carefully worked-out plan of Industrial Unionism into Russia, which, within three months, had more than two million dues-paying members—many more than the I. W. W.—and today has twelve million. However, when the Syndicalist Factory Shop Committees turned out to be the best form of revolutionary labor organization for the taking over of production, the Bolsheviks welcomed the Syndicalist form of organization. Bill Shatov was one of the leading builders of the Factory Shop Committee form of organization (although he was not, as one writer in *One Big Union* has it, the originator of Workers' Control).

We agree with the Fellow-Worker that Syndicalism has supplied the missing link in the problem of labor organization for the ~~time~~ action of the united working class. But we want to call his attention to the fact that the Syndicalists of Russia—and among them Shatov, Nelson and other former I. W. W. members in this country—are cooperating with the Bolsheviks, and have accepted the principle of Proletarian Dictatorship as the necessary characteristic of the transition-period between Capitalism and the Industrial Commonwealth. We want to point out that the Syndicalists of Eur-

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that after a few outbreaks they will carry the day."

"But"—and here the writer dismisses the Spartan tactics—"these methods have not succeeded even in Germany," to say nothing of America. The author evidently never realized that most, if not all, of the responsibility for the "failure" of the Spartacists in Germany must be ascribed to his spiritual and political partisans—the Scheidemanns!

The victory of the working class—in the opinion of the editorial writer—will be won not through a revolutionary struggle, but as a result of a "political success at the polls". In other words, this is the well known realization of Socialism... through voting at elections, through the "parliamentary majority". Evidently the author has not progressed, has forgotten nothing and learned nothing during the last few stormy years, though he states at the beginning that "nearly all Socialists are somewhat more radical than they were before the war". Apparently he even does not belong to these "nearly all".

However, the author shows some signs of swinging to the "Left"; a tribute, as it were, to the spirit of the times. Reluctantly, he is even ready to admit the possibility of application of "violence" during the period of the social reconstruction in this country. But Socialists on no account will be guilty of such "violence". They will patiently vote. "Violence" may be applied only as a result of "provocation" on the part of the "conservatives"—and even this "after we (i. e., the Socialists) become the majority".

But even in case of such "provocation on the part of the conservatives... It is not the part of a political party to incite to violence. By its very nature and essence, a political party is an organization that uses peaceful, political methods. If violence should come, its natural way of coming would be by way of the unions, not the Party."

However, there are still to be found Socialists who claim that a Socialist Party, by its nature and essence, differs from all other political parties in that it is a revolutionary party, and that its task is not to follow the tail of the unions, but to march forward, to lead the unions, lead the whole working class!

All this revolutionary mission the Bergersonian editorial providentially entrusts to the unions (and of course, to the unions of the American Federation of Labor,—he recognizes no other unions). It is the more convenient, so that the failure of the Revolution and the shameful conduct of the Social-Patriots before and during the war, might be ascribed to these same unions, as is being done by one of Berger's comrades, Morris Hillquit, in his latest pronouncement.

After all this anti-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary absurdity, the author finally gives some practical advice to his readers regarding the "Left Wing".

In a nutshell his advice is, "For God's sake, don't deal with these seditious persons".

And this advice is given by the author of the editorial article in an open manner, frightening and playing up the basest, small-town "Hebrew fear" of his readers:

"If you are thinking of joining the Left Wing—by taking part in the formation of a Communist League or otherwise—we want you to know exactly what you are about. If you join the Left Wing, you thereby agree to take an active part in a bloody uprising in Milwaukee."

The added words, "in Milwaukee" (remember, this "bloody uprising" will take place precisely here in Milwaukee) are of special significance, and, as the readers can see for themselves, bear all the attributes of a provocative denunciation.

The picture is completed by flinging a delicate hint regarding the political honesty of the "Left Wing":

"We feel certain that our capitalist enemies have some of their paid spies in the Left Wing to urge the use of violent methods"...

Already the late Comrade Mehring, in his famous letter to the Russian Bolsheviks, pointed out that one of the methods of the "Scheidemanns" in fighting the Independent Socialists and the Spartacists was the accusation that they were "paid agents of the Government," and provocateurs. It looks as if the methods of the "Scheidemanns" in all countries are alike.