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Open the Prison Gates!

ONE of the chief subterfuges to which Capitalism frequently resorts to mask its real character is the refusal to recognize the existence of conditions which it cannot successfully defend. Thus although at the present time thousands of men and women languish in jail for political offenses as the result of an act of Congress aimed at, and almost exclusively executed against, political heretics, the existence of political prisoners is not officially recognized, even though the act providing punishment for political offenses is still in operation.

Autocracy recognizes its political offenders, "politicos", because autocracy is government from the top, and anyone who questions the sanctity of its laws is guilty of Lese Majeste. Under autocracy it is not necessary to violate a law, merely to question its righteousness is a crime, because in questioning the law of autocracy the inviolability of the autocrat is assailed. Democracy is theoretically the rule of the people, by the people, for the people. Under democracy the questioning of the laws or acts of those chosen to administer the government becomes not only a right, but a duty. Hence a democracy, theoretically and by its very nature, can not punish those who question the political wisdom of its acts or laws.

Thus when Capitalism finds it necessary to cast aside the fiction of democracy in its acts, it continues to remain democratic in theory by the simple expedient of refusing to recognize the existence of the victims of those acts, in the same manner as a society lady snubs those whom she considers socially her inferiors and rests secure in the thought that what she does not recognize does not exist.

In this country the hysteria of war was used to enforce measures for punishing those who refused to subscribe to the prevailing ideology, and as a result thousands of men and women are undergoing long terms of imprisonment for "offences" which the majority of the people do not recognize as offences in normal times. The very arguments by which these people were convicted—that whatever their rights might be under ordinary circumstances they were subservient to the general welfare of the people as a whole in the face of a great emergency—are the strongest advocates of their immediate release, from the bourgeois viewpoint, now that the emergency has passed.

But by far the vast majority of these prisoners were not convicted and sentenced because they were a danger to the welfare of the whole people in view of the national crisis, but because they were a danger to Capitalism, and the national emergency furnished a means whereby the people could be made to acquiesce in their incarceration. The I. W. W., the Socialists, the men who stood for the freedom of the individual, the liberals, were imprisoned for criticising the existing state of society, and because present day society is resting on a foundation of sand and this criticism was revealing the facts of the case to the people at large, they will remain in jail after the emergency, that superficially was the cause of their imprisonment, has disappeared.

The war is to all intents and purposes over. The military and naval power of the enemy has been broken, yet the prosecutions against those who dare to reveal Capitalism in its hideous nakedness continue. Eugene V. Debs, a man who for over half a century has borne an unblemished

reputation as a fearless fighter in the cause of the world's oppressed, whom his very prosecutors proceed against with shamefaced excuses for the nature of the work they are performing, and who is already under a sentence that almost certainly condemns him to death in a felon's cell, is reported to be again under investigation with a view to further prosecution under the so-called Espionage Act—prosecution which has long since ceased to have any title to the term prosecution, but which rather takes on the nature of the more ugly word persecution.

The trial of five members of the Socialist Party for alleged attempts to hinder the successful prosecution of the war by the government, is even now preceeding at Chicago, though the war is over. Victor L. Berger, one of the five men in question, has been again indicted since the cessa-

Political Amnesty

Resolution passed by the Central Committee of Local Boston, Socialist Party, December 10, 1918:

While the discussion rages about Germany making reparation, there is a reparation that the Socialists and the workers generally must insist upon—reparation to the men and women imprisoned for their courageous insistence upon the rights of free speech and free press, men and women punished for their efforts to make our own country safe for democracy during the war.

Thousands of men and women are languishing in prison, while the government is preparing to sentence still others, not for any ordinary crime, but for offenses recognized as political by every other country in the world, including formerly Czarist Russia.

Whether that was its purpose or not, the Espionage Act was used to crush Socialism, to strifle the free expression of ideas, to cow the American people.

But whatever its necessity during the war, even that alleged necessity exists no longer. The problems of the coming peace are vast and fundamental requiring the freest expression of ideas; but while the reactionary has full freedom of expression, the Socialist may be jailed if he fearlessly, frankly, and fundamentally discusses the problems of war and peace.

And yet this full, free and fearless discussion is absolutely necessary, otherwise, the coming peace will be a reactionary peace.

It is therefore resolved, by the Central Committee of Local Boston, Socialist Party, that the Espionage Law should no longer be in operation;

That complete amnesty is the right of every man and woman now in jail, or in danger of going to jail, for political offenses;

That the working class and all labor organizations should consider these two measures as vital to the workers' interests, and that not alone should the working class demand, but it should struggle and use its industrial might to accomplish this purpose.

tion of hostilities and must stand trial twice under indictments that, reduced to everyday language, charge him with being an enemy of the people, although the people of his residential state have declared by the suffrage that he enjoys their confidence to such an extent that they have chosen him to assist in the administration of the national government.

William D. Haywood faces what to a man of his years means life imprisonment for attempting to gain better living conditions for that section of the people who constitute a large proportion of the population of the country, the unskilled workers, and with him in Leavenworth jail are over a hundred of his associates, while all over the country others are being sentenced daily to long terms of penal servitude for the same "crime."

Thomas J. Mooney, who was tried before this country actually became involved in war but against whom the war hysteria was also subsequently used, is doomed to spend his life in jail

although it is stated by high officials in the government that this case did not receive a fair and impartial trial.

These few instances, out of the thousands which exist, are sufficient to show the real nature of these prosecutions, the fact that with the cessation of hostilities the prosecution of the cases pending have not been dropped, and the continuation of indictments under the Espionage Act clearly show that the powers that be have no intention of granting a general amnesty.

France has promised that she will grant amnesty to her political prisoners, Italy has already put such an amnesty into effect, as has Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria. England and America alone of the Western powers have remained silent on the question, but in England the prosecutions have ceased and even during the war the sentences imposed upon the most outspoken critics of the war and the government were mild compared to the 20 and 30 year sentences imposed in America.

Events move with lightning rapidity during these days of change and already many of the ideas, which those now lying in prison advocated, are being accepted by the masses as their vision clears, other of these prisoners' thoughts are projecting themselves into the discussions now engaging the world's attention. It is gradually emerging from the smoke of battle that many of the hitherto generally accepted theories of government work injury to the people, new values are being created, new standards are evolving, men are groping blindly for the solution of old problems only to find themselves faced with new ones. A new era is being born. Are the apostles of this coming era to lie in jail? A world that studies the question must answer, no. Even from a selfish viewpoint, the answer must be the same. These men are needed in the world today. Those who foresaw the coming of the new era are surely needed to help grapple with the problems it will produce.

But in this new era is contained the destruction of many things dear to the heart of those who benefit under the present system and it is precisely because these heralds of the new system of society hold the key to the solution of the problems now facing the world, that the disciples of the present system will endeavor, not only to keep those already sentenced in jail, but to put behind prison bars those who see with the same clear vision.

If these prisoners are to be released, if the bastiles of Capitalism are to be thrown open, it is the workers—those for whom the new day is dawning—who must liberate them. To this end the class conscious workers must devote themselves, the Socialist Party must bend its efforts.

There appears to be a tendency towards the formation of various leagues to effect a general political amnesty, but this road leads to failure. Only the working class can effect the desired result. There must be unity of aim and unity of effort. The vast majority of those lying in jail are there because of their fealty to the cause of the proletariat and in turn the proletariat must act in fealty to them, and to themselves.

United, the workers are invincible; divided into various sections, by no matter how kindly disposed persons, they are doomed to failure. Let the workers speak with one voice and the vibration will shatter the prison walls.