

## Mass Action

IT is necessary that the Left Wing of the Socialist Party appreciate clearly its own policy and tactics. We are still in the stage of disagreement, of discussion; but by means of these we shall approach a clear understanding necessary to become a power in the proletarian movement.

An important difficulty is that the old disputes still rumble in the minds of many comrades. We must test our old ideas in the light of contemporary events, recognize that the old ideas of revolutionary action have been supplemented by the experience of the proletarian revolution in action. There is a tendency to accept old ideas as Bolshevik, the policy of the Left Wing of yesterday as being the policy of the Left Wing of today. But much water has passed under the mill since five years ago; theory has met its complement in practice; and it is necessary that we discriminate between the old and the new, adopt a policy in accord with the requirements, theoretical and tactical, of contemporary conditions. The source of revolutionary practice is not the theory of yesterday, but the experience of the proletarian revolution in Russia and in Germany,—accepting but the old conceptions.

An essential phase of the Left Wing movement, of revolutionary Socialism, its tactical basis, is mass action. But old meanings are read into this term, and many refuse to recognize its fundamental character. *The Proletarian*, organ of the comrades of the Detroit Socialist Party, says in its March issue:

What is mass action? Is it just our old friend Direct Action come back with a new suit of clothes? We will do well to inquire into its meaning before accepting it. At present it seems to be the rallying cry for all the elements who have repudiated the old parliamentarism. . . .

In his recent book, *Revolutionary Socialism*, Louis C. Fraina tells us that "mass action is not a form of action as much as it is a process and synthesis of action. . . . Mass action is the instinctive action of the proletariat, gradually developing more conscious and organized forms and definite purposes. . . . Mass action is the proletariat itself in action."

Austin Lewis, in *The New Review*, June, 1913, says: "Real mass action is outside the sphere of parliamentary action; it has nothing to do with the election of men to political positions, and yet is in the highest degree political."

Anton Pannekoek defines mass action very completely thus: "When we speak of mass action we mean an extra-parliamentary political act of the organized working class by which it acts directly and not through the medium of political delegates. Organized labor fights develop into political mass action as soon as they acquire political significance. The question of mass action, therefore, involves merely broadening the field of proletarian organization."

The outstanding feature of the literature on mass action is a general haziness, a lack of clarity and a wealth of conflicting definitions. And at this time when the new tactics are being formed we must, above all, have clarity of thought.

At its state convention recently, the Socialist Party of Michigan, influenced largely by the Detroit comrades, adopted the following definition of political action: "We do not imply that political action is always confined within bounds of parliamentary procedure; nor that the means employed in waging the class struggle are everywhere the same. Political action we define as any action taken by the exploited against their exploiters to obtain control of the powers of state." This is more than hazy, it is seriously defective, in that it lays emphasis on "obtaining control" of the bourgeois state machinery, instead of *destroying* it,—which are two different things. The political power of the proletariat comes from out of the organization of the new proletarian state. Nor does the definition indicate what other forms of struggle there are which are included in political action. But the definition is correct in tendency.

A strike for higher wages or shorter hours clearly, is not included in "any action," its object is not to "obtain control of the powers of state." But if the strike is for a political object, to secure the franchise, or the release of political prisoners, or to overthrow the government, it is a political strike and comes under political action in the Marxian sense. Now a strike of this political character must be a mass strike, a political general strike,—and that is one phase of mass action.

Mass action develops out of the industrial action of the proletariat. Imperialism means concentrated, monopolistic industry; concentrated industry means large masses of workers massed in one plant, expropriated of their skill, and largely unorganized but disciplined by the machine process. These workers, deprived of skill and consequently of craft jealousy and divisions, act in terms of the mass, strike as a unit—the initial development of mass action. When this industrial action includes several plants, or several cities, and has a political object, it develops into real mass action. It is direct action, in the actual sense;

it is not "direct action" in the technical sense, since the Anarcho-Syndicalist exponents of "direct action" had no recognition of the political character of the proletarian struggle and the function of the new state during the revolution.

The quotations cited by *The Proletarian* (we excluded one as not characteristic) may be unified in this way: Mass action is extra-parliamentary; it is the proletariat itself in action through mass strikes, dispensing with parliamentary leaders except as these may recognize and become merged in the mass action; it is the instinctive action of the proletariat, since it develops in the shops, its initial forms determined by mass industry, and the proletariat's consciousness and action determined largely by the compulsion of industry; out of this industrial mass action develops political mass action against the state, for definite political purposes; it means the broadening of the field of proletarian action—which is precisely what is implied in the Michigan Socialist Party's conception of political action.

Mass action is a process and synthesis of action since, first, it develops larger forms out of the initial primitive form and includes large masses of the proletariat in action, and, secondly, since it becomes political in character at the moment of definite action for the conquest of power.

The conception of mass action developed in the Left Wing of the European Socialist movement, which provided the theory for an instinctive action developed by the proletariat under the compulsion of imperialistic Capitalism. The exponents of mass action have been Marxists of the first magnitude, who recognized Marxism not as a means of explaining the past, but as an instrument of action, as a dynamic phase of the proletarian struggle,—Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Pannekoek and Trotsky. Surely, the Anarcho-Syndicalist theoretical conception of "direct action" cannot be attributed to these Marxist adherents of mass action.

The final and complete form of mass action was described by Trotsky in *The Proletariat and the Revolution*, published in 1904:

We have got to summon all revolutionary forces to simultaneous action. How can we do it? First of all we ought to remember that the main scene of revolutionary events is bound to be the city. Nobody is likely to deny this. It is evident, further, that street demonstrations can turn into a popular revolution only when they are a manifestation of masses, that is, when they embrace, in the first place, the workers of the factories and the plants. To make the workers quit their machines and stands; to make them walk out of the factory premises into the street; to lead them to the neighboring plants; to proclaim there a cessation of work; to make new masses walk out into the street; to go thus from factory to factory, from plant to plant, incessantly growing in numbers, sweeping aside police barriers, absorbing new masses that happen to come along, crowding the streets, taking possession of buildings suitable for public meetings, fortifying those buildings, holding continuous revolutionary meetings with audiences coming and going, bringing order into the movements of the masses, arousing their spirit, explaining to them the aim and the meaning of what is going on; to turn, finally, the entire city into one revolutionary camp,—this is, broadly speaking, the plan of action. The starting point ought to be the factories and the plants. That means that street manifestations of a serious character, fraught with decisive events, ought to begin with *political strikes* of the masses.

That was precisely the course of revolutionary events in the proletarian revolution in Russia. The final revolutionary mass action breaks independently of the will of the conscious representatives of the masses, breaks loose spontaneously under the pressure of crisis and instinctive action. It is then the task of the Socialist to organize and direct. Theorized form, or purposes, of this final mass action is the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat functioning through the new proletarian state of the federated Soviets.

The Moscow *Isvestia* in October last year printed the following news which shows in what light Imperial Germany's attack on Russia was viewed by many German soldiers:

"From the German troops who camp on the demarcation line and, generally, in the occupied districts, daily come deserters and groups, who refuse to go to the French front. Lately the German soldiers armed with rifles go over to the Soviets and join the Red Army. A few days ago near Pskov, a party of deserters with rifles and two machine guns crossed the border and joined the Red Army. Another party—18 men—headed by a German officer, on their way to Russia fought a pitched battle with Bavarian detachments and fell in a heroic struggle. All deserters declare that they do not want to fight any longer for imperialists and are ready to die for real freedom, proletarian freedom. Together with the German group there was found another deserter—an Hungarian sailor escaped from Austria after the uprising in the Austro-Hungarian fleet."

## Bolshevikjabs

MUCH has been said and written about the proposed League of Nations, but so far as we are aware no one has ventured to explain how the International Police Force is going to be recruited without recognizing Ireland.

The Health Commissioner reports that there is no sleeping sickness in Boston, there is nothing remarkable in this fact when we consider that sleeping sickness presupposes a period of wakefulness. There is no sleeping sickness in the A. F. of L.

When we see all these denunciations of the aliens we cannot help wondering what would happen if the 17,000,000 aliens got annoyed and went home.

Now that the Committee on Public Information is ended we may expect that in the near future some information will reach the public.

If a man celebrates the Declaration of Independence on July 4 by getting drunk will he be a patriot or a criminal?

"Bolshevist Rising Feared in Bohemia Unless Food Arrives" says a headline. From this it would appear that famine causes Bolshevism but from reading the editorials in the bourgeois press on Russia and the German Spartacans we of course know that it is the other way round—that Bolshevism causes famine.

The Mayor of Buffalo is reported as saying that there are only 15,000 people out of work in the city and that often in the past this number has been exceeded without causing any comment. We would like to call "his honors" attention to the fact that people are thinking more these days; besides the Kaiser didn't cause any comment among the German people until recently.

Cleveland H. Dodge is becoming so anxious about the starving Armenians that we are beginning to believe the Armenians must be excellent copper miners.

What with the proposed trip of Queen Marie of Rumania to this country and King Alfonso's plans to visit South America we are beginning to believe in the immigration restrictions.

Now that conscription is done away with—in Germany, we can congratulate ourselves on the death of militarism, of course we are going to have at least five big armies and as many navies, but these are for defense only so it's alright. Militarism is dead, long live universal military training.

Just when the League of Nations is getting on so nicely and peace is about to be signed we think it is most unkind of these unemployed people to be walking about the streets.

And talking about the signing of peace, when the signatures have all been fixed will it be correct to say that peace is finished?

Judging from the newspaper headlines the worst thing about war is the coming of peace. In fact it looks as if we would have to elect a commission to draw up a set of the rules of civilized peace.

Would it be correct to say that we are at present waging peace?

We suppose the opposition of the clergy to prohibition arises from a desire to save their jobs and a feeling of resentment that Congress should take on what has hitherto been their exclusive privilege.

Although we can understand that in these days of crashing thrones things are apt to be overlooked we fail to see why the Czecho-Slovaks, the Jugo-Slavs, and all these other peoples whose rights we were so anxious about a few months ago have suddenly dropped out of sight.

Is it that they have got their rights and are now trying to find out what to do with them or is it—but no, of course, not. Didn't one of them name its capital Wilsonstadt?

We know that George V is a democrat, and that Victor Emmanuel is at least not antagonistic to the word but we sometimes wonder whether or not the Mikado really understands politics well enough to feel at home in Tammany Hall.

And speaking of the Japanese we would like to know whether these guys in the League of Nations are the same Japanese as the kind we like so well in California?