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The Press as an Agent Provocateur

FINDING, apparently, that the campaign to discredit Bolshevism, waged with such persistency, particularly since the signing of the armistice, is not producing the desired results, the bourgeois press is developing new methods of attack. The publicity, even though it has invariably been a lying and condemnatory publicity, given to Bolshevism has proven to be a double-edged sword and while, no doubt, many working people have been scared into antipathy, the majority of the workers, whose instinctive class consciousness has revolted against the absurdities daily displayed for their consumption, have become curious if not actually sympathetic towards the subject.

The rehash of the German atrocities with the substitution of Russian workers for "Huns" and Grand Dukes and gentle ladies for Belgians has not aroused the indignation expected, perhaps because after a time people become indifferent—even to the death of Grand Dukes. Consequently the press has had to search around for new ways of combatting the "menace." As before it underestimated the strength of the Socialist movement, now it runs to the other extreme and presents it as alarmingly strong. Flaring headlines "disclose" the eleventh hour discoveries of gigantic plots to seize the government of the United States by the organized forces of Bolshevism. The obvious implication of these stories being that were it not for these fortunate discoveries this country would have already passed into the hands of the Bolsheviks at least half a dozen distinct times.

All over the world Socialism is making gigantic strides, strides which even the ablest Socialist theorists and propagandists are unable to measure with more than approximate accuracy. The holocaust of war has aroused the class consciousness of the workers, and the examples set by Russia and Germany have done much to bring the toiling masses to a realization of their own potential power. The masses of the people are seething with unrest, strikes are flaring up all over the world, strikes that are real movements of the masses themselves and are often directed against the old-time leaders as much as against the capitalist class. The common people are awakening and asserting their rights to the fruits of their labors. America is not escaping this general unrest any more than the countries of Europe, though as yet the labor disturbances in this country are more sporadic, less conscious and, in the main, confined to smaller issues than the European upheavals.

The brutality and ruthlessness of the master class are, however, forcing the issue. The assumption of power, the openly revealed determination to force down wages and the shameless attempts to utilize the returned soldier as a club for this purpose, the utter disregard of the war time promises and discharge of thousands of workers are producing a reaction which is projecting the class struggle in bold relief.

The ignorance of the bourgeois press regarding the Socialist and Labor movements of the world in general and of this country in particular has often been the theme of Socialist writers, but it is idle to pretend that this ignorance extends to the approximate numerical strength of the class conscious labor movement of this country. This ignorance is confined, for the most part, to Socialist theory. On actual conditions the capitalist press is well informed. Hitherto the newspapers have engaged in a conspiracy of silence where labor troubles were concerned; even within the past few weeks such momentous happenings as the Seattle and Butte general strikes received scant attention until they were over. Both these strikes were pregnant with tremendous possibilities, both partook of the aspect of the recent Irish and English strikes, which in addition to being of gigantic proportions were semi-political in character. In spite of the importance of these two strikes, involving tens of thousands of workers, the press kept comparatively silent, but within the past week labor troubles have sprang into great prominence. The New York Evening World announces in flaring headlines: "Plot Bared For Soviet Control of U. S.," the New York Tribune shrieks of "Reds" planning a "reign of terror" and all over the country the newspapers carry stories of a coming "Red coup d'état."

In view of the fact that neither the "plot" nor the "reign of terror" proved to be anything but police stupidity in one case and an unemployed delegation visiting the Mayor of Buffalo in the other, it is reasonable to suppose that some ulterior motive lies behind this sudden change of front in the newspaper attitude. From a perusal of the stories dealing with these matters it is evident that in each case the events have been highly colored, colored, indeed, to such an extent as to lead the reader to believe that the Bolsheviks are a tremendous force, skilfully organized and only waiting the order to rise up over night and seize the government. The object seems to be to give the impression of great numbers behind these move-

disputes is the attitude of the soldiers and on this subject the press has remained silent. In practically every recent strike the employers have attempted to use the returned soldier or sailor as a scab and in almost every case they have been unsuccessful. In Seattle and Butte the soldiers and sailors were in active sympathy with the strikers and took their places on the picket lines in uniform. In the street car strike in New Jersey the soldiers and sailors paraded in sympathy with the carmen, and in the Lawrence textile strike the number of soldiers and sailors in the ranks of the strikers is variously estimated at from five hundred to one thousand, and, over two hundred having formed themselves into a "Strikers' Guard" to maintain order during the strike.

All these movements are mass movements, the workers themselves striking as a protest against intolerable conditions. The war was used to keep the workers on the job, the plea of national necessity overshadowing the grievances of the workers, but now the war is over and the people are looking for the fruits of democracy for which they fought and suffered, only to find that they are facing a period of unemployment, want and poverty. They are beginning to realize that while the owners of the factories made enormous profits out of the war, they are staring the grim spectre of unemployment, with all its attendant evils, in the face.

Against these conditions and the potentiality of these conditions the workers are protesting, striking, asserting themselves. The press has immediately labelled their protests "Bolshevism" and while the average worker may believe that the happenings in Seattle or Butte, two or three thousand miles away, were the work of a menace to society—Bolshevism—he knows the real conditions of his own fight and when he finds that it is also "Bolshevism" he immediately becomes very partial to the Bolsheviks.

The Soldiers and sailors, returning from the sacrifices made in the war, are finding that they are no longer heroes in the eyes of the employers unless they are prepared to become scabs on their own class. They are learning from the newspapers that instead of being heroes they are becoming a menace to society once they dare line up with their fellow workers in a labor dispute; they are also learning through other channels than the newspapers, through the agency of the policeman's club and the police court sentences, which invariably follow their appearance on the picket line. They are becoming used to being called Bolsheviks and I. W. W.'s, and these terms are losing their erstwhile terror. Conditions are forcing the soldiers and sailors to recognize that there is a class struggle going on in society and that they are part and parcel of the working class.

The press has howled "Wolf" so often that its shriek is losing its terror, and as a result the press is now attempting to incite the workers into premature action by representing their every move as a revolution. Finding that slandering Bolshevism while at the same time it is forced to slander every protest made by the workers has only had the effect of connecting Bolshevism sympathetically in the mind of the people with their own struggle, the press is apparently determined to play on the emotion of the uninformed to the end that they may be betrayed into actions which will recoil on the heads of the masses of the people.

Labor's struggle for its "place in the sun" must come from the workers themselves, its actions must rise out of the needs of the people's masses, and its strength will lie in its ability to choose its own time to enforce its demands. The masses must develop a clear understanding of their position in society, must be the arbiters of their own destiny, the judges of their own strength. They must learn to judge the importance of the press reports of the activities of their class as they are already learning to know the real import of the movement that has broken down the slavery of the Russian workers and is even now struggling to burst the chains that the bourgeoisie, led by majority Socialism, would bind tighter round the workers of Germany. Action is coming in our own country; that mass action which cannot be provoked, but which is determined, implacable, irresistible.

Police Brutality in Lawrence

Serious rioting occurred in Lawrence on Tuesday as a result of a police attack on the strikers returning from the picket lines. On Monday a body of forty or fifty soldiers, the Strikers Guard, turned out on the picket lines. Their appearance apparently angered the police and the soldiers were dispersed, one of their number being specially picked out by the police and arrested.

On the way to the police station, after the other soldiers had gone, ten policemen set upon Ribaldo Francesco, the soldier in question, who has only recently returned from 18 months service in France with the 23rd Infantry. He was severely beaten about the head and shoulders, his eyes being injured, his teeth loosened and his back and shoulders bruised and cut from the blows of the clubs. After he was taken to the station, Francesco says, he was again beaten up by the police, this time, however, clubs were not used. When brought into court he was fined \$20.

News of the treatment received by Francesco so roused the strikers that they turned out in large numbers on the picket lines the following morning. On their return from picket duty the strikers were met by the police who, after the marshal had read the riot act, charged the workers. A fight ensued, over twenty persons being hurt and as many arrested.

In spite of this police intimidation the workers are determined to continue the strike until their demands are granted. Money is urgently needed, the strike having now entered its seventh week.

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ments and the inference is that the whole matter is a plan to lead some hot-headed irresponsibles into actions that will enable the forces of reaction to crush insurgent labor in blood.

The "plot" for Soviet control of the United States proved to be nothing more than a sensational account of a raid on the headquarters of a Russian workers' organization in which apparently every person in the building was arrested and dragged to police headquarters for examination. Out of one hundred and sixty-four persons thus arrested all but four were released in a few hours, there being absolutely no evidence against them. What purports to be the constitution and program of the organization is published and, of course, contains a clause relative to the "nationalization of women" which is invariably dragged into all news stories dealing with Socialist activity since it was introduced as evidence before the recent Overman Committee. Although the raid was conducted by the "bomb squad" the story fails to say how many bombs were discovered or what preparations had been made for the seizure of the state. In the Buffalo incident it finally developed that the whole affair consisted in a parade of a few hundred unemployed to the city hall. The account was interspersed with frequent references to the arrival of troops in Buffalo, though it omitted to mention whether the troops were to shoot the people for being out of work or whether they were to proceed against the employers that discharged the men and women in question.

One of the principle features of all the recent labor