

What of Amnesty?

WHAT can I say in answer to your cry?

Were I to say "I care terribly as to the fate of our bravest and best beloved Comrade—our 'Gene,'" would you believe if, in the very same breath, I added "but I must put all my energies into the organization of the Communist Party and into the industrial organization of the working class?" Would you not think that, perhaps, like the Pharisees of old, I was offering merely lip-service? That I do not really care what becomes of him who has devoted his long life to the workers that they might set themselves free, and is now imprisoned for their sake? Nevertheless, it is true that I care terribly, even though I am not giving any of my time and energy to the pulling of wires, seeing "people of influence," working up amnesty sentiment among the "liberal elements," or drawing up, and getting signed, petitions to the President.

May I hope, dear Comrade and friend, that you will nevertheless believe that I am convinced I am doing more toward the freeing of our "Gene" than those who work by the means above enumerated? Years ago, I left all the "charitable and philanthropic" work I was then intensely engaged in, and joined the Socialist Party, to which I gave all my devotion and service. This did not mean that I was less a lover of my kind or less charitable (though it seemed so to the superficians). It only signified that I had found a more fundamental means of "helping" the poor. Instead of working through surface reforms, I began to hammer at the root of the evils my "charities" never touched.

I believe that today I am taking the same fundamental attitude toward the question of the release of our class-war prisoners. Let who will putter with "Amnesty" conventions, petitions, sympathy of liberal-bourgeois reformers, it is my business to go to the root of power—the working masses—the proletarian ranks—with whom, and with whom alone, power lies.

I wish that, somehow, you could be saved from the bitterness with which misunderstanding of the great issues involved in the party divisions threaten you. If you had clear understanding of these issues, you could not believe that petty quarrels, senseless quarrels, within the party, are preventing the early release of "Gene" and all our class-war prisoners. A vital difference in tactics is *not* a petty senseless thing. Tactics! I know with what a scornful curl of the lip the word is echoed by some. Yes, tactics, we say. Can there be unity and harmony between those who, for example, approach the social question, some from the point of view and theory of the charity-worker, others from the viewpoint and conviction of the social revolutionists? Only a question of tactics, isn't it? Yet the two elements cannot conceivably work together.

Either the one is right, or the other. They cannot both be right, and the wrong, if pursued head, to futility or disaster.

We of the Left Wing, have no faith—not the slightest scrap of it—in the many-sided game of appealing to the logical enemies of the worker. Be they called liberal, radical, or anything else under the sun, we know that no power lies in that direction; and not only no power, but worse than that: *betrayal*—for every real or apparent "favor" granted! There is only one power that can safely release our prisoners; that is the power of a conscious proletariat.

A Letter from a Left-Winger to a Left-Over.

The "ranting reds," as some of our mistaken comrades have joined the bourgeoisie in naming us (the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party soon to be the Communist Party) are convinced that the most effective work they can do for the successful release of our comrades is to agitate like mad for the industrial organization of the workers and give the workers a consciousness of their own power. The organization of a Communist Party will do more to force the capitalist government into a new attitude toward our prisoners than would a dozen "Amnesty" Conventions. There are a few comrades who believe that the way to help is by "getting together" with the "best elements" among the bourgeois-liberals, and petitioning the president etc., etc.

We have no illusions on this score. We know that power lies with a conscious, unified working class; we are letting no grass grow under our feet before setting to work to instill that consciousness and aid that unity. We want the prison doors open, and we are convinced, this is the only way, it can be done. If I were to be asked to enter the prison gates tomorrow, I would be selfishly glad, as well as glad for all the imprisoned workers, *that outside, was a new Communist Party and a gathering industrial unity in the country*—the only power in these United States that can ultimately get and keep us out of prison.

If all who were busy flirting with the A. F. of L. officialdom and with the bourgeois-liberal elements had instead busied themselves making inroads upon the consciousness of the rank and file, the Convention in Atlantic City might have demanded the release of all political and class-war prisoners. *That* would have some significance. Let the industrial unions grow strong enough, and the Communist Party formidable enough and the working class will command the opening of all the prisons—a command that none will dare disobey. We shall not go begging on bended knee—kowtowing to the enemies of labor, for justice to our own class—justice to *their* enemies. No compromise with them is possible. We must stand alone—a working class depending on its power—a power that is gathering to the point of invincibility. Until then, we must be willing to suffer imprisonment, death, if need be. I am sure that 'Gene,' himself, the clearest of class conscious rebels, would agree to every word here uttered.

I know some of the arguments offered in favor of coalition for amnesty at this particular time, but no immediate advantage is worth the confusion that would result to the workers. We, in effect, become traitors to the working class if—for whatever laudable purpose—we gloss over or ignore irreconcilable class antagonisms—make the workers feel that their economic enemies are their political friends. Not that way lies power. That way lies only confusion. Confusion!—the one thing in the worker's consciousness that causes him to allow exploitation and delays the day of eman-

ipation and self-rule! Our purpose, as revolutionary Socialists is to make a class conscious proletariat and build working class solidarity. Thus, by coalition with the bourgeoisie—for amnesty or any other political purpose—and the resultant confusion to the workers, *we defeat the very purpose for which we suffer imprisonment gladly.* Would it not, therefore, be the strangest of contradictions for revolutionary Socialists to take part in such a convention as the official Socialist Party had proposed? Imagine: here we have worked for years and bitter years, to build up the class solidarity that would set the workers free. As the struggle becomes more clearly defined, the inevitable happens: many of us are thrown into prison. Then we rush into an "Amnesty" convention, taking into our arms and falling on the necks of the historic foes of the workers—and smash goes a good bit of the structure we have so painfully reared!

All honor to the comrades who are of the Left Wing, who refuse to lend themselves to such a policy of betrayal. With their attitude I am in full accord. I might myself have been confused on this issue, but for the fact that my own wandering (in 1917), blindly and in confusion, has given me clearer sight. Knowing where I was weak, I now prefer a longer term of prison for myself, rather than to expose the weakness of my own fellow workers to the same banal influences that confused and blinded me for a while.

I see no other way. There is no royal road to emancipation. We shall beg of none of our enemies, in the Government or out. I will agree with you that there are many sincere people, not of the workers, who are "friendly," but we are not concerned with individuals. We must work on the clear line of the class struggle. We must build our proletarian ranks conscious, determined, numerous as the "sands of the sea." They shall be invincible. Upon them we rely for their freedom and our own. If there is no help in them, there is no help anywhere. While the class conflict lasts (and that must continue, with increasing intensity until the proletarian revolution is an accomplished fact), we may not hope for freedom. Released from jail one day by the "friendly" enemy, we shall surely be clapped into jail again the next—*unless we desert the struggle!* No, there is no hope for help anywhere, except in the workers. The worker, conscious, unified, determined, is to be our deliverer. And him we have yet to create! Can you wonder then, that I believe in going to the task without any more delay? I want 'Gene' out of jail—I want everyone of my comrades out of jail, when I am in jail, I shall want myself out at the earliest possible moment, and I want the workers out of the jail of their slavery. That is why I am with the Left Wing, and shall be with the Communist Party.

'Gene' with his clear vision, sees this. That is why he too is of the Left. It is naturally harder for some of us to keep our vision clear, because our eyes are blinded with tears. We suffer too intensely for him, to think or see clearly *with* him. Without true vision, however, there can be no right action, and without right action no emancipation—no hope.

Please believe that I am yours with the dear love of Comrades,

ROSE PASTOR STOKES.

July 28, 1919.