
A Reply to Debs.

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The Socialist (Counter-)Revolutionaries were on trial at Moscow. Victor Chernov, fomenter of armed uprisings against Soviet Rule in Russia, from his haven of safety in Berlin, Germany, was cabling to "Socialists" throughout the world, urging them to protest to Lenin on behalf of his fellow-criminals against the Workers' Republic, who faced conviction for their crimes and sentence of death.

One of these cables went to Eugene V. Debs, at Chicago. Debs cabled to Moscow, "protesting with all civilized people in the name of our common humanity against sentencing to death of any of the Socialist Revolutionaries or the unjust denial of their liberty."

This cable of protest prompted me to address several questions to Debs, asking him if he was really acquainted with the nature of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the crimes, not only of its members, acting as individuals and party officials, but of the official acts of the party itself in plotting the overthrow of the Soviet Republic, in planning the assassination of Lenin and Trotsky, in accomplishing the murder of Uritsky and Volodarsky, in aiding international imperialism at every opportunity to attack the rule of the workers and peasants.

Debs replies that he does not "defend the acts of the Socialist Revolutionaries," that he merely "pleads for their lives," and advances as his strongest plea that the "Soviet Government has nothing more to fear from these defendants."

During the past 8 years, the revolutionary

movement has gone through two testing periods, in America three. The first came in 1914, with the outbreak of the war, when professed social revolutionists turned social patriots over night.

This testing period was repeated in the United States when this country entered the war in 1917, the Socialist Party first adopting the St. Louis Anti-War Proclamation, and then proceeding to betray it.

The next testing period, for the whole world, came with the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, November 1917, with the labor movement dividing for and against the Soviet Republic, the "sympathizers" standing in between.

When the Socialist Party wavered as it did in the convention held in Chicago in 1918, Debs came from his home, addressed the gathering, and kept the party straight for a time. That was the summer Debs made his speech at Canton, Ohio, that won him his 10 year sentence to prison.

Humanitarian and pacifist, it was easy for Debs to be anti-war. The test of his standing as a revolutionist came in 1920, when, as the Presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, he declared, "I am a Socialist, not a Communist."

Two years more have passed since then and there has been some hope of winning Debs for the revolutionary movement. Since leaving prison, Debs has not openly endorsed the Socialist Party. But he has now joined the Socialist Party and the reactionists in the labor movement, from [Benjamin] Schlesinger to Gompers, in an effort to besmirch the first beginnings of the world social

revolution in Soviet Russia.

Where is the Debs that said in his Canton speech, June 16, 1918:

“If war is right, let it be declared by the people — you, who have your lives to lose; you certainly ought to have the right to declare war, if you consider a war necessary.”

The workers and peasants, soldiers and sailors of Soviet Russia wanted peace after their revolution in 1917. But world capitalism, in Washington, London, and Paris, as well as in Berlin and Vienna, wouldn't let them have it. Soviet rule thereupon called the demobilized soldiers to the standards of the Red Army.

It is this Red Army, directed and inspired by Communists, that built the invincible wall of bayonets that held in check the war machine of world capitalism.

The flower of working class manhood, drawn from Russia's undermanned shops and factories, cheerfully went to its death in that struggle. The stories of “The Death of a Red Regiment,” “The Red Funeral,” and “The Death Train of Siberia” will live forever.

The Socialist (Counter-)Revolutionaries, with their party, stood on the side of capitalist oppression, and they must suffer the consequences. Debs says, “The Socialist Revolutionaries were the victims as well as the perpetrators of outrages.” Surely Debs cannot expect the Red Army to wage war for working class emancipation with wooden cannon and cartridges that carry no bullets. Surely, in his Canton speech, he didn't expect the people to declare war under those conditions.

War demands that one takes sides. No less does the class war demand that. The Soviet delegates at Genoa [April 10-May 19, 1922] demanded peace and disarmament, but were rejected. They sought the road to peaceful reconstruction at The Hague but were denied it. France maintains her army. Great Britain develops the largest air fleet of any nation. World capital is still

hopeful of enslaving the workers and peasants of Soviet Russia. And the Socialist (Counter-)Revolutionary Party is one of its staunchest allies.

Let Debs read the proclamation issued by the Communist International “To the Workers of the World!” on the Hague Conference [June 15-July 20, 1922], and he will come to its closing paragraph as follows:

“Long live the united front of the proletariat for the defense of the positions conquered by the World Revolution, and for the conquest of new ones!”

No letting down in the class war there. No easing up of the struggle to achieve the social revolution. The Soviet Republic tests its every step with the question, “Will it help the world revolution?”

The Socialist (Counter-)Revolutionaries were placed on trial. They were convicted and 14 condemned to death, others being sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. The Central Executive Committee of the Russian Soviet Government decided to stay the execution of the Socialist Revolutionary conspirators. They will not be executed, “if the Socialist Revolutionary Party actually ceases all underground and conspirative acts of terrorism, espionage, and insurrection against the Soviet Government. If, however, the Socialist Revolutionary Party will continue the same methods of struggle against the Soviet regime, this inevitably will bring about the executions.”

Thus the Soviet Republic, through its highest organism, admits the danger of continued attack and retains capital punishment as a weapon against its enemies.

Capitalist nations may rest upon their arms for recuperation between wars and wax merciful for a time toward war objectors, toward pacifists. But there is no letup in the class war until the social revolution has spread to every land and established its victory without dispute. Then, with the inauguration of a Communist Society, mercy and humanity will come into their own, not because there were those who sympathized with Len-

in or Trotsky, or any other revolutionary leaders, but because the world heard the tramp of millions ready to give their all, their lives, for the winning of the New Day.

The trial of the Socialist (Counter-)Revolutionaries in Soviet Russia has been another phase of the social revolution that has help to clearly divide those who stand with from those who oppose the Workers' Republic.

Debs says he is willing to plead for the life of the vilest criminal, even for one who would attempt to assassinate him, but he feels that he owes nothing to the Communists. He said the Communists ignored him and the other political prisoners.

Perhaps Debs will remember that in a few hours, on January 1 and January 2, 1920, thousands of Communists were seized and imprisoned in Palmer's "Red Raids." The Communist move-

ment was attacked because it had established new revolutionary frontiers in this country. The iron fist of American junkerdom was raised to crush the young American Communist movement. In that attack it was easy for the American junkerdom, finding new victims, to release the war prisoners, until they have now been given their freedom with a few exceptions.

But no Communist has been pardoned or released in this country. And they fill the prisons of practically every land on earth, testimony to the fact that the class war rages and grows ever more bitter.

Communism replies to capitalism with its own weapons, the weapons that capitalism forces into the hands of the workers in the struggle for their emancipation. It gives blow for blow. Woe to those who attempt and more to those who succeed in weakening the blows of labor.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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