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Debs and His Slanderingers

By George Breitman

If the Stalinists were wise, they would scrupulously refrain from ever mentioning the name of Eugene V. Debs...



factional struggles, and did not even attend conventions where the leadership was elected.

The history of American socialism might have been different, and the revolutionary movement stronger today, if Debs had acted differently.

Hook's review and the attitude of his fellow Social Democrats to Debs remind us forcibly of the opening lines of Lenin's great work, State and Revolution:

ADULTERATORS

"What is now happening to Marx's doctrine has, in the course of history, often happened to the doctrines of other revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes...

Since Hook's aim is to divert his readers from the path of Debs, it is not surprising that he concludes his review by singling out Debs' weakest side...

What the Social Democrats did to Marx and what the Stalinists did to Lenin in this way, both the Social Democrats and Stalinists, each after their own fashion, are now trying to do to Debs.

An equally offensive review of this biography was the one written in the July 17 N. Y. Times by Sidney Hook. A Social Democrat, whose ideas the capitalist press is always willing to give space to these days, Hook has no more in common with the Debs tradition than the Stalinists do...

Like many other detractors of Debs who pose as his admirers, Hook damns him with faint praise. He stresses Debs' personal qualities but divorces them from his political contributions, and he exaggerates Debs' weaknesses in order to deny his real significance in the development of the American socialist movement.

DEBS AS LEADER

Debs, he concedes, was a great human being, he was a fighter; he was endowed with purity of intent, intellectual as well as physical courage, and a "great and simple heart."

"DERIVATIVE IDEAS"

Hook's arrogance in sneering at the "derivative" character of Debs' ideas is truly something to marvel at. Unlike Debs, Hook had an opportunity to study the full body of Marxist teachings; unlike Debs, he had a chance to acquaint himself with the rise and degeneration of the first workers' state...

Why the Stalinists Are Afraid To Face Commission of Inquiry

On July 13 Farrell Dobbs publicly challenged Howard Fast to submit to an impartial Commission of Inquiry the slanderous charges against the Socialist Workers Party...

He also implies that this charge was made against the Trotskyists in wartime. That is the only possible meaning which can be attached to his phrase: "at a time when this country was facing the full threat of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy."

EASILY ESTABLISHED These facts, which are well known to the Stalinists, were confirmed by Professor Thomas I. Emerson, the eminent legal authority of Yale Law School, in his speech at the Bill of Rights Conference last month. But the

Stalinists continue to proclaim their own crooked version of the events. Our emphasis on these points of fact does not mean that we believe civil liberties and free speech should operate only in peacetime.

"Stalinism... is not an abstraction of 'dictatorship,' but an immense bureaucratic reaction against the proletarian dictatorship in a backward and isolated country. The October Revolution abolished privileges, waged war against social inequality, replaced the bureaucracy with self-government of the toilers, abolished secret diplomacy, strove to render all social relationships completely transparent. Stalinism reestablished the most offensive forms of privileges, imbued inequality with a provocative character, strangled self-activity under police absolutism, transformed administration into a monopoly of the Kremlin oligarchy and regenerated the fetishism of power in forms that absolute monarchy dared not dream of."



TROTSKY



LENIN

The First to Face U. S. Arms

What will be done with the arms that Truman wants to send to "any nation" or "group" abroad that he sees fit? Here are some of the things already being done by governments financed and armed by the U. S.

British troops are used as strike-breakers against English dock workers. French troops shoot down French coal miners and smash their strike. Italian troops shoot striking Italian peasants and attack industrial strikes.

sands of Portuguese political and labor prisoners rotting on his dread prison islands. British, French and Dutch troops — all U. S.-equipped — massacre the peoples of Malaya, Indo-China and Indonesia. Military cliques in Venezuela, Peru and other Latin American countries overthrow popularly-elected governments with American arms and institute dictatorships that bar strikes and unions.

Support of the foreign arms program is support of a program to prop up capitalist reaction and to murder strikers, opponents of dictatorship and colonial fighters for independence. These are the first "aggressors" who will confront the weapons that Truman might send anywhere under the terms of his foreign arms bill.

Clark and Truman's Supporters

Truman's appointment of Tom C. Clark to the Supreme Court brings sharply to the fore the role and responsibility of the most prominent labor, liberal and minority organizations. As everyone knows, their very existence depends on the preservation and extension of civil liberties.

Truman has given them his reply, not alone by his past actions but also by this act of appointing to the Supreme Court a man who is the very embodiment of the "loyalty" purges and the witch-hunts. To crown the insult, Clark happens to be a dyed-in-the-wool representative of the Southern Jim Crow forces and the chief government executor of strikebreaking by injunction.

The AFL at its convention last November went on record against the "loyalty" purge and asked Truman to withdraw the executive order which set this purge in motion. The CIO, which likewise held its convention last November, took similar action.

How serious were the CIO, the AFL, the ADA and the NAACP about their opposition to the "loyalty" purge and their demand on Truman? Were they just talking for the record, giving lip-service to the struggle for civil rights? Or did they really mean what they said? It is now squarely up to them to answer this in action.

The ADA, a coalition of liberals and prominent labor officials, took the same position at its convention in April of last year. So did the NAACP, the largest Negro mass organization, at its convention last month.

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Steel Profits and Capitalist Parasitism

Even those of us who have long been aware of the staggering profits made by the United States Steel Corporation and the basic steel industry generally are astounded by the almost unbelievable profits figures revealed in their latest statements.

They prove indisputably that the steel industry hasn't a leg to stand on in its arrogant refusal to meet the steelworkers' just demands. In fact, it could meet these demands, reduce steel prices and still make profits at its high war-time level.

But even this doesn't tell the whole story. U. S. Steel's report hides another \$35,000,000 of profits under "depreciation reserves" — a bookkeeping trick to make its profits look smaller by 25%. The company paid taxes on this "reserve" — which means that the government regards it as profits.

But these facts about steel profits in this period of rising unemployment — and they mirror the kind of profits being made by the other monopolized basic industries — have an implication that goes beyond the immediate wage issue, vital as that is.

On the basis of present reduced materials costs and operating at 100% capacity, the steel industry could grant wage increases and pensions amounting to 30 cents an hour to every steel worker and still enjoy annual net profits of \$966,600,000 as compared to the annual rate of \$797,300,000 based on the 1949 first quarter take.

Why should labor, which creates all, continue to tolerate a system that permits the existence of such parasites? Why should labor, the overwhelming majority of the people, not end this intolerable drain on society by ending the profits system, expropriating the monopoly industries and establishing the planned system of socialism?

THE CONTRAST ON WAR

After all, what was the one thing about Debs that is most honored today, if it isn't the courageous stand he took against World War I? What is the Debs tradition if it isn't a consistent struggle against imperialist war despite persecution, vilification and imprisonment? That is just what the Stalinists basely betrayed in World War II.

Lenin, in his Letter to American Workers, hailed Debs for saying that he "would rather be shot than vote for loans for the present imperialist and reactionary war; that he, Debs, knows of only one holy, and from the standpoint of the proletariat, legal war, namely: the war against the capitalists, the war for the liberation of mankind from wage slavery!"

But the Stalinists, acting in the interests of a reactionary labor bureaucracy of the kind Lenin and Debs fought all their lives, not only supported the war loans, appropriations and taxes in the second imperialist war, but they took the lead in breaking strikes, curbing the Negro struggle and fomenting lynch hysteria against all militant workers and anti-war fighters.

Another of Debs' great services, perhaps not so well remembered today as his anti-war fight but at the time deeply appreciated by workers in all wings of the labor movement, was his leadership and unceasing activity in the struggle for the preservation of civil liberties. Mention any of the famous labor defense cases from the time he entered the socialist movement until he died — Moyer and Haywood, the McNamara brothers, Tom Mooney, the IWW and other victims of the wartime and postwar raids, Sacco and Vanzetti, just to recall a few — and always Debs was on the firing line, giving unsparingly of his time and resources for their defense.

Even the anti-war lecture tour which culminated in the famous speech at Canton was entered on by Debs with the intention of challenging the wartime attacks on free speech and free press by the Wilson administration. It is to Debs, as much as any other figure, that we are indebted for the noble tradition of solidarity in defense of all tendencies in the labor movement, no matter what political views are held by the workers under the attack of the class enemy.

CP AND CIVIL RIGHTS

What a far, far cry from the behavior of the Stalinists, not only in the Soviet Union where they have completely destroyed workers democracy but here in the United States where they themselves are a persecuted minority. As I. F. Stone aptly put it, they "taint" the struggle for civil rights, including the protection of their own, by denying such rights to their working class opponents.

In short, there is no more truth to the Stalinist claim that they are carrying forward the struggle begun by Debs and his fellow pioneers than to their pretense that they are heirs and continuators of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Visit your local headquarters of the SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY. AKRON - 4 So. Howard St., 2nd fl. every afternoon 1 to 4 p.m. Meetings Sunday 2 p.m. BOSTON - Worker Educational Center, 70 Stuart St., open Wed. 5:30-9:00 p.m., social Sat. open Sat. CHICAGO - 168 W. Washington Blvd., 2nd fl., phone MA 4100. Every afternoon except Sun. CLEVELAND - Pecks Hall, 1446 E. 82nd St. (off Wade Pk. Ave.), Monthly Public Forum, 1st Sun., 8 p.m.

