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Social Revolution

Genuine Brand

Albert Meltzer

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May 1941

Retrieved on 22nd September 2020 from
<https://libcom.org/library/social-revolution-genuine-brand>
First published in *War Commentary* Vol.2, no.7

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ble. It is also quite clear that the conflict of imperialism offers all sorts of revolutionary situations that may be utilised by conscious revolutionary movements everywhere.

In many cases serious collision is bound to arise between popular revolution and bourgeois-nationalism. Should the European “New Order” collapse, there are no end of applicants for the cushy jobs that will be going in the re-constituted Europe. All the crowned – and other – heads of State will want their old jobs back, and the queues are already forming in London and New York for the new governments of Germany and Italy. (One can hardly blame some of our harassed politicians for wanting to see the revival of the old German Confederation, with its thirty-six or so sovereigns).

So far as the British Empire is concerned, bourgeois-nationalism will prove a very real obstacle to social revolution in the colonies and in India, although today it appears in a semi-progressive role of anti-imperialism.

Bourgeois-nationalism, therefore, while it is useful today as an anti-imperialist force in conquered Europe, Asia and Africa, must be guarded against as a potential danger.

Most potent is the danger of new tyrannies arising from the ashes – the anarchist message that the destruction of one state by revolution and the reconstruction of another means death to the revolutionary achievements is of vital importance in the world revolution.

The imminence of a revolutionary situation as the imperialist struggle drags on is not to be disputed. It is not so certain that such a struggle will be waged to a successful libertarian issue, unless the revolutionary workers are clear as to the means of revolution. Success for such revolutionary efforts anywhere are certain to spread like wildfire amongst the millions of toilers in all parts of the world. The time for the world revolutionary movement – and this term is once again becoming synonymous with anarchism – to strike, against imperialist world war and for its opposite, working-class revolution may not be in the too-distant future.

In the last issue of War Commentary I endeavoured to analyse briefly all these fake-revolutionary movements and to show that in reality all reformists were working towards, not reform and certainly not democracy, but towards dictatorship. “Reformism” is no longer synonymous with “democracy”: on the contrary, it is the reformist movements everywhere where they are permitted to exist which are endeavouring to shackle the workers to the governmental war machine, very often in order that the capitalist governments will not suppress them in order to do that job themselves.

Let us now consider the case for the genuine brand of social revolution. What the pre-requisites of a revolutionary movement today?

In the first place, it must be against the imperialist war. All sorts of pseudo-scientific excuses are invented for defending different imperialist regimes. In the socialist movement, there are those who declare it to be of importance to “defend the Soviet Union” – the joint cry of Stalinists and Trotskyists – and those who declare it to be of imperative necessity to “defend democracy” – i.e. British-American imperialism. None of these in reality can be said to be anti-imperialist or opposed to this war whilst they agitate for the defence of empires, dictatorships and the like.

The Stalinists are at least consistent in one thing, the defence of the Soviet Union, which has been their one guiding light for years. In order to defend Stalin’s dictatorship they will quite cheerfully ally themselves with Churchill or with Hitler, according to Russia’s latest friendship. From this point of view they need be considered as nothing more than marionettes dancing on the strings of the Russian Foreign Office. Their bitter opponents, the Trotskyists, have the same policy of defending the same regime, only they adopt different tactics (on the grounds that they are more effective), i.e., they advocate revolutionary defeatism, as revolutionaries, but (significantly) not in the U.S.S.R. whose workers they urge to rally to the defence of the state, but to turn out the “inefficient” Stalin bureaucracy (adopting the same tactics as the British social-

democrats in their fake “struggle” against British capitalism – only stopping short of asking Stalin to declare his war aims). We do not see how anyone claiming to be a revolutionary can assume the responsibility for the calling of the workers of the world to the defence of the Russian dictatorship based on the State exploitation of the worker. Those who, claiming to be revolutionary, call for the support of British-American imperialism, do so on two grounds: (1) the belief that the war can be transformed – with whom I dealt in my last article – and, more particularly (2) the belief that democracy exists in these empires (“it is not now a question of capitalism versus socialism but of a democratic capitalism versus a dictatorial capitalism”), That such a democracy does not exist in the slightest vestige in the colonial empires is notorious. (and the case of these, admitted). Their belief is that what is to be defended against European fascism is the free speech, association and thought that exists in the metropolis. This, unfortunately, is dwindling. It is not considered by them that Britain’s turn to fascism will leave them as completely helpless as were their fellow-social-democrats on the continent. In the event of a British victory, they will be unable to influence events, and in the event of a German victory, they will be powerless to resist the introduction of fascism from that quarter either. To do them credit, they admit that. Quite cheerfully they declare that if Hitler wins, the world, apparently must cease to live – which, though it is no doubt good as superficial propaganda, is a little deficient insofar as a working-class policy in peace and war, victory and defeat, democracy and dictatorship, is concerned.

We Anarchists do not accept responsibility for the defence of any of the governments. To us, the immediate working-class policy must be one of self-defence against encroachment and infringement of liberty from within whatever state, and the preparation for social revolution.

WHAT IS SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Since we understand by “social revolution” the complete expropriation of the means of life by the working class, it is natural that we cannot make the easy promises of the left-wing politicians about a better world following the war; it is certainly impossible for it to be gained by collaboration with the State.

What we do say is that a revolutionary situation may arise which the revolutionary workers must do their best to exploit, and which they can only exploit by being prepared for it. (By “exploit” is meant utilise for the benefit of the workers themselves, and not for the benefit of any power-hungry set of politicians. By “preparation” is meant clarification of principles and practice.) If there is a sufficiently vigorous body of workers in the places of work, agitating for the means of self-reliance and direct action, any revolutionary situation that may arise will be a potential social revolution of the genuine brand, that alone will bring freedom in the true sense of the word.

The means and the principles we have often elaborated in these columns; namely, the formation of committees of workers in their places of work, in whatever uniform or beneath whatever flag they are forced to appear. The spontaneous linking of these committees must be encouraged, into the form of industrial unionism, and with the syndicalist programme of direct workers’ control. Finally, control by each industrial union of its industry, for the benefit of the community, and with the abolition of the State machinery under whatever name it may adopt.

IS WORLD REVOLUTION POSSIBLE

It is clear that the conflicting imperialist powers have made every possible path towards civilisation and peace, other than that of revolution against imperialism and power politics, quite impossi-