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Tom Brown
The Internationale
March 1942

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The Internationale

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The “Internationale” has appeared in the news at almost weekly intervals since June of last year. Russia’s entry into the war was followed by the B.B.C. controversy “to play or not to play.” The song might serve Russia in place of a national anthem but still that did not live down its rebel past. After that came news and rows about it being played or not played at anything from political banquets to football matches.

From all this hullabaloo has come the idea, repeated again and again by the ill-informed Press, that the “Internationale” is a Russian Bolshevik work. Our readers will know of course, that it is neither Russian nor Communist. It was written in French by Eugène Pottier in 1871 and composed by Pierre de Gayter [Degeyter], a Belgian worker who became resident in Paris. It was adopted by the French labour movement, especially the revolutionary syndicalists, became known throughout Western and Central Europe, and eventually reached Russia. After the Revolution the Russian National Anthem was scrapped and no other adopted. Instead the new Russian Government sought to gain the support of the international workers by using their rallying song, the “Internationale.” Since the Bolsheviks seized power they have dropped internationalism

and developed “soviet patriotism,” but the old melody lingers on. People are rarely conscious of what they are singing, a visit to church will prove that, and a man who has never sent his mother a postal order for years will bring himself to tears by singing of that much celebrated, but neglected, lady. So, the “Internationale” is being sung on queer occasions and in queer company. Recently at a West Ham football match, the band played it and followed up with “God Save the King,” the crowd standing bareheaded throughout.

But just to make sure of it the song has been re-formed. The words have been rewritten by Helen Bantock and the music rearranged by Sir Granville Bantock. The new publication claims “all rights reserved” and “copyright in the U.S.A.” (So far the new authors or their publishers, are not claiming the rights of the “Londonderry Air” or the copyright of “Hamlet.”) The words have been made so respectable, they cease to have any meaning – the “Internationale” in a top hat!

“Awake, O sleepers from your dreaming, Uplift, uplift your longing eyes: the star of Truth above is gleaming.” begins the new version. In the second verse the workers of the world are to “*wrest the wealth from land and sea.*” That is what they are doing now, but the product gets into the wrong hands – the new “Internationale” says nothing of that. None of the old “*on our flesh too long have fed the raven, we’ve too long been the vulture’s prey.*” Perhaps the chorus is the most dashing part of this middle-class version of the old fighting song. “O comrades, assemble” it bids. Altogether a worthy companion of “God Save,” and like it could be used for emptying picture houses. Just as a matter of historical interest we reprint the *old* words. No rights reserved, no copyright.

Arise! ye starvelings from your slumbers,
Arise ye criminals of want,
For reason in revolt now thunders,
And at last ends the age of cant.

Now away with all your superstition,
Servile masses, arise! arise!
We'll change forthwith the old conditions
And spurn the dust to win the prize.

Chorus

Then comrades, come rally,
This last fight let us face—
The Internationale unites the human race.
Repeat

No saviours from on high deliver,
No faith have we in prince or peer,
The slave's own arm his chains must sever
Chains of slavery, greed and fear,
E'er the thieves will disgorge their booty
And to each grant a happier lot
Each at the forge must do his duty
And strike the iron while it's hot.

Chorus

These kings defile us with their powder
We'll have no wars within the land,
Let soldiers strike, for peace cry louder,
Lay down arms, join hand in hand.
If these vile monsters still determine
Heroes to make of us in despite,
They'll know full soon the sort of vermin
Our bullets hit in this last fight.

Chorus

We peasants, artisans and others
Enrolled among the sons of toil,
Let's claim the earth henceforth for brothers:
Drive the indolent from the soil.
On our flesh too long has fed the raven,
We've too long been the vulture's prey,

But, now farewell the spirit craven,
The dawn leads forth a better day.

Chorus

Instead of these stirring words, we are to have petit-bourgeois sweet nothings. No song, no music ever suffered such a wretched fate – not even the Marseillaise or Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. "O comrades assemble," take your partners for the Floral Dance!