

MILITANT
Mar. 24, 1934

On the Resolution of the National Youth Committee

The thesis of the National Youth Committee contains the formulation: "It is essential in the educational and propaganda of the Spartacus Youth Clubs and Young Spartacus, American revolutionary traditions, bourgeois and working-class, play a predominant role."

It is my opinion that this formulation is confusing right from the start, and serves only as a hindrance to the education of the youth. My reference is particularly to the phrase, "bourgeois revolutionary traditions."

One encounters these days many references to these "bourgeois revolutionary traditions". Demagogues and reformists of all shades exhort the misery-stricken workers and farmers to find salvation by following the footsteps of their "revolutionary forebears", the Madisons, Adamses, Jeffersons and Company. They lay claim to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the American flag itself. "All this", they say, "belongs to the American people. This is what they understand." Away with the imported Marxism of the Reds." There is a rich experience of late with this sort of stuff, what with the latest "Continental Congress", and the flag waving at unemployment and trade union conferences. Because of this, it seems to me, our thesis should strive more than ever to explode, with the weapons of Marxism, this spurious Americanism for the American working class.

Liberal Phraseology

The liberal phraseology of the Jeffersons and Madisons is essentially the same as the Liberal phraseology of the Roosevelts. Just as Roosevelt, in the interests of bourgeois private property, deludes the masses with words, and tries to cover up the class struggle, so the Madisons and Jeffersons, in their time, acted in a similar manner, the difference being that at the time of the Madisons and Jeffersons, these demagogues had a progressive role to perform. The fight for independence from England was a progressive fight. But what is even more important for the proletariat of today to remember is that it was the artisan and farmer who in the main formed the fighting forces of the revolution, and tried to make of it a social revolution. The aim of even the most extreme bourgeois revolutionists were linked up with the institution of private property, which institution, of course, it is the aim of the proletarian revolutionary to overthrow.

The establishment of capitalist

private property was a progressive step historically as compared with feudal private property. But when the bourgeoisie try to put the word, final, on human history, now that their aims are realized; when the bourgeoisie calls the proletariat who try to go one step further and totally abolish private property "the coarse rabble", it is the Marxists who beg to remind these gentlemen that force has always been the midwife of history; that the bourgeoisie accomplished their aims, as had the feudal lords before them and slave lords before them, by forcible means; and that they could not have done otherwise. And that we "reserve the same right" to accomplish our greater aims. Does that justify our including in the thesis a call to study "bourgeois revolutionary traditions"? No, that only helps to confuse the matter. For what we emphasize, above all, is that they utilized revolutionary means to accomplish their aims, with which the proletariat can have nothing in common, just as they utilized the extravagant rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence when they needed to mobilize the masses for the revolution but that once the masses accomplished the revolution, they sought to consolidate their power and foisted the adoption of the Constitution upon the masses with all the fraudulent means we now designate as Tammany and at which our "revolutionary forefathers" were masters indeed.

What we emphasize is what Marx emphasized in 1849, when the National Assembly passed the Faucher bill against the right of association, although the constitution guaranteed all Frenchmen the right to organize:

"What the constitution, first of all, was to have constituted was the rule of the bourgeoisie. Evidently, the constitution could therefore mean by the right of association only such associations as were in harmony with the rule of the bourgeoisie; i. e., with the bourgeois order. If, for reasons of rhetorical decorum, it expressed itself in general terms, was not the government and the National Assembly there to interpret it in specific cases? And the Constituent Assembly decreed that the violation of the text was the only adequate realization of its literal sense."

Lenin on the Jacobins

There are comrades who think that because Lenin said the Bolsheviks were proletarian Jacobins that justifies our calling the Mad-

Robins and Jeffersons consistent revolutionaries whom we have to save from the "misinterpretation" of the bourgeois professors. Space does not permit me to go into an explanation of the Great French Revolution, its similarities and dissimilarities with the American Revolution. Suffice it here to state the following facts: there were really two revolutions within the scope of what is known as the Great French Revolution: that of 1789 led by the bourgeois Gironde and that of 1793 led by the petty-bourgeois Jacobins. Our Revolution of 1776 was not followed by a revolutionary Jacobin wave, but by reaction, for the Constitution was, broadly speaking, the document of the counter-revolution. The Jacobins, though they cleared the ground for the bourgeois order, were trying to represent the sansculotte. It was exactly this contradiction in internal make-up plus, of course, the fact that there were not the material requisites for such a transfer of power that caused the downfall of the Jacobins.

Long ago Plekhanov correctly estimated the Jacobins:

"Private property and the petty bourgeois purposes closely connected therewith, forced themselves into the programs of even the most extreme revolutionaries of that time.... The Party of the Mountain failed just because of that innermost contradiction between its petty bourgeois conceptions and its endeavor to be a representative of the proletarian interests.... To the present-day representatives of the working-class, these contradictions are foreign, because modern, scientific socialism is nothing but the theoretic expression of the unbridgeable antagonism of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat."

Exactly. And Lenin was very careful in explaining what he interpreted Jacobinism to be; he defined it "as the transfer of power to the revolutionary oppressed class, for that is the essence of Jacobinism."

The Struggle of the Masses

Our predecessors, the artisan and poor farmer, though weak in organization and not constituting as clear-cut a class as the proletariat of today, accomplished the revolution, and tried to make of it a social revolution; it was through their pressure that even such democracy as we now have was established. They accomplished this in bitter struggle against the bourgeoisie. It is this heritage of the struggle of the masses (the people) that we accept. Once more I refer to the French Revolution and how Marxists interpreted bourgeois achievement.

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Listen to Trotsky:
 "In general the bourgeoisie, in the proper sense of the term, opposed the peasant revolution with all the power it had.... Throughout the five years (1789-1794) the peasantry rose at every critical moment of the revolution, preventing a deal between the feudal and bourgeois property holders.... The Parisian sansculotte, pouring out their blood for the republic liberated the peasant from his feudal chains."

I repeat: it is this heritage of struggle of the masses everywhere that we accept. And this heritage will find its realization when the now full-grown proletariat will sweep aside the now impotent and reactionary bourgeoisie from the historical scene. It is this message that we bring to the American working-class youth. When we Americanize Marxism, we bring to the American working class the message of Marxism, of proletarian revolutionary internationalism, not a vulgar flag-waving speech. We do not make the confusion of the youth that is trying to free itself from the bourgeois point of view foisted upon him more confounded by speaking of "American revolutionary traditions, bourgeois and proletarian". At best, this is a misleading phrase, an unfortunate wording, and ought to be stricken out from the thesis, which should be a guide to action, not confusion.

—RAE SPIEGEL.

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