
The Bolsheviks: Grave-Diggers of Capitalism

by C.E. Ruthenberg

Published in *The Ohio Socialist* [Cleveland], whole no. 53 (Jan. 29, 1919), pg. 4.

Bolshevism — what fear and anger the word arouses in the minds of the rulers of society!

Daily the press pours out its denunciation and men in high places issue their warnings and threats against it. Bolshevism is anarchy, it means rioting and bloodshed, wholesale murder and destruction. It means the collapse of orderly society, the breakdown of production, and consequent misery and poverty.

Thus speak those whom Bolshevism threatens with the loss of their privileges to amass wealth at the expense of the misery and poverty of the masses, and with this lurid version of what they term a new movement of the dregs of society they desperately seek to inspire the masses of the people.

Why does Bolshevism arouse such dread and anger among the exploiters of the workers? Why do they fear it so and why these threats of merciless suppression?

Is Bolshevism really something new? Is it something that the working people of Europe have just discovered — something to which they were driven, perhaps, by the suffering and misery resulting from the world war?

Marx and Engels Furnish Answer.

The answers to these questions are to be found in the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels — who first formulated the scientific principles underlying the modern Socialist movement. By examining these principles, as stated in their writings, particularly in the first working class platform based on the development of capitalist industry — the Communist Manifesto — we can find out whether Bolshevism is merely the bursting forth of too long suppressed popular

unrest, or whether it is the culmination of a working class movement, guided by sound, scientific principles.

Marx and Engels said that the history of the past was the history of a class struggle. They said that in each period of the past there appeared a ruling class — rich, powerful, living in luxury and splendor — and an exploited class which worked hard and long but enjoyed little of the wealth it brought into existence. They said that in the past the struggle between these classes had resulted either “in the revolutionary reconstruction of society or the common ruin of the contending classes.”

In modern society this struggle presents itself, they said, in a conflict between the capitalists who own the factories, mines and mills and the means of production generally, and the workers who have to sell their labor power to these capitalists in order to earn a living.

How the Workers are Robbed.

They said that since the capitalists own the things that the workers must use in order to earn a living, the capitalists have the whip-hand and that they compel workers to sell their labor power for much less than the value of what they produce. In fact they argued that the workers usually receive in the wages paid them only just enough to buy the necessities for a poor sort of living for themselves and to provide for the raising of children so that the line of workers might not be exhausted. The workers produce the amount of wealth they receive in wages in two, three, or four hours, depending upon the technical development of industry, but they are compelled to keep on working up to eight, ten, or twelve hours and during the hours they work over and above the time required to produce their wages they produce “surplus value” for the boss.

They said that naturally the workers attempted to improve their standard of living by an effort to secure more of the wealth they produced and that the capitalists resisted this effort of the workers in order to keep as much as possible of the product of industry for themselves as profits, and that, consequently, there was a class struggle between the workers and capitalists.

That Marx and Engels were right any workingman who thinks at all about the facts of how he gains his living must admit. That he must secure the consent of the capitalists, or their representatives, in order to work, he knows well enough from bitter experience in hunt-

ing for a job. That he receives in wages only about enough to feed, clothe, and house himself and his family — and sometimes even has a hard struggle to get that — he knows extremely well. That on the other hand there is a small number of people who live in luxury and splendor without doing any productive work, because they get the profits he produces, is equally plain. To prove that there is a class struggle he need only think about the numerous and constantly occurring strikes.

Class Government.

Marx and Engels said, further, that the governments in all capitalistically developed countries were instruments of class rule; that they were controlled by the class which owned the machinery of production and that the power of government was used to uphold the system of exploitation and to suppress the efforts of the workers to win their freedom.

That they were right in this, also, we can easily prove by the acts of the governments of capitalist countries. Even in those countries which have the most democratic institutions the governments are class governments — “committees for the conduct of the common affairs of the bourgeoisie.” In the United States the workers have the ballot and are in a majority, but the capitalist class controls the means of information. It controls the newspapers, the schools, the colleges, and the pulpits, and through this control it is able to mold the minds of the voters so that they elect to office men who will uphold their class interests. And when they are unable to control the voters they can always win over the “good men” elected to office by the pressure they can bring to bear through their economic power and promises of preferment. Consequently the government of this country, as is proven by its acts, is greatly concerned and constantly engaged in passing laws conserving the interests of the capitalists, but never legislates in the interests of the workers.

The Way to Freedom.

Marx and Engels pointed out also that the development of the means of production was bringing larger and larger masses of workers together in industry and that the system of production was changing from individual production to collective production. Private owner-

ship of industry, they said, was a fetter on the development of the highest and most efficient form of collectivism.

They meant by this what Mr. McAdoo, Director-General of Railroads, pointed out in his annual report, when he said that under private ownership the railroads sent freight by roundabout routes and lost millions of dollars because they did not use common terminals. The coal industry furnished another example of the fetters of private ownership on collective industry.

Marx and Engels said that the way to freedom for the workers was, in harmony with the development of industry, to transfer industry from private control and ownership by the capitalists to the common ownership and democratic management by the workers.

They said that to accomplish this the workers must gain control of the state — the government — and change it from an instrument of capitalist oppression to a means of establishing the common ownership of industry and management by the workers.

They said that when the workers took control of the government there would come into existence a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” that such a dictatorship of the proletariat was necessary in order to break down the resistance of the capitalists to the socialization of industry, but that as the transformation of industry from private ownership for profit to collective ownership with management by the workers in the industries proceeded, the state would lose its class character and become merely an organization for the administration of industry; that in place of being an instrument of class rule it would become a huge cooperative organization of all the workers for the common purpose of supplying themselves with food, clothing, homes to live in, education, and recreation.

The capture of political power by the workers might come through in a mass movement and revolution, as it did come in Russia and as it is now manifesting itself in Germany, or it might come as it did in Finland, where the Socialists elected a majority of the Finnish parliament and where civil war exists because the propertied classes resorted to force to stop the workers from proceeding with the work of socializing industry.

Bolshevism — Applied Marxian Socialism.

Now we are ready to answer the question whether Bolshevism is something new.

If we place in parallel columns the principles of Marxian Socialism and the acts of the Bolsheviks we will find that the Bolsheviks are acting upon the principles that Marx and Engels laid down more than a half century ago.

They organized the workers for a class conflict.

They seized control of the power of the state and established a dictatorship of the proletariat.

They are using the power of the state to wrest control of industry from the hands of the capitalists and to build up a democratic administration of industry by the workers.

In the period of transition the power of the state is being used to establish collectivism and democratic management. This process wipes out of existence the capitalist class, and as this class disappears, being absorbed in the ranks of the workers, and its power of resistance ends, there disappears with it the coercive power of the state and industrial democracy takes its place.

Bolshevism is not something strange and new. It is not a blind, raging force of destruction. If at present its triumph is accompanied by bloodshed and destruction it is because the bankruptcy of capitalism precipitated a cataclysm and the workers are obliged to build the new order amidst the wreckage of the old and with those who profited from their former oppression and exploitation placing every obstacle possible in their path.

Bolshevism is Marxian Socialism in action. It is the social revolution underway. It is the workers on the road to victory and a better world.

We Are Not Immune.

The capitalist owned newspapers are shrieking loudly against Bolshevism. They are lying about it. They are resorting to the most desperate measures to poison the minds of the workers against it.

The reason why they do this is clear.

They know that the exploitation and oppression of the workers in industry exists in this country as it exists in Europe. They know that the Socialist Movement in this country has and is carrying on the same kind of campaign of education and organization among the workers that was carried on in Russia and in Germany, and that the time is coming when the workers here will engage in the same struggle for their emancipation that is now going on in Europe.

They know that this struggle will not be precipitated by the schemes of a few individuals, but that it will be the logical result of the historical development in industry.

The Bolsheviks are the grave-diggers of capitalism and the builder of the new world. They are removing the wreckage and debris of a bankrupt system of production and putting in place the foundation on which will be erected the structure of the new society — the better and more beautiful world of the future.

It is because the grave-diggers of the system that gives them great weal and luxury are at work that the capitalists rave and are filled with fear and dread.

For the workers the present is the period of hope and joy in anticipation of coming happiness.

Edited by Tim Davenport

Second edition — reformats. First edition was 2005.

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · March 2014 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.