

Mr. Thomas and Communism

by Ben Gitlow

Norman Thomas is caught in his own perplexities. He is in a messy jumble of confusion, contradictions, and absurdities. In discussing social problems he reminds one of the bewildered fly, imprisoned in a tumbler of his boy captor. How the fly does frantically flap and turn up and down, sideways, diagonally, until finally dizzy, exhausted, unable to maintain its equilibrium, it gives up and falls to the bottom of the tumbler. I do not imply here that Norman Thomas will fall a victim to his own inconsistencies. Such will not be his fate. The welcome accorded his views by the capitalist world is a definite assurance that he has his place and purpose in their political sphere. Norman Thomas's way out is a "way in" for the workers and farmers, for the exploited masses. It is they who will be the victims of his program. It is they who will be caught in the maze of his ideological confusion. His program seeks to so confuse, so baffle the masses that they will not be susceptible to ideas and movements that lead to positive, definite action against their exploiters, against capitalism.

The World of Reality

We no longer live in the period of abstractions. Norman Thomas should know that. The present period has given us an outstanding historical event which removes from the sphere of speculation, scientific or otherwise, the course of present day historical development. There were times when we tried to anticipate proletarian revolution, social revolution, times when we eagerly devoured books and prophecies on the structure and nature of the future Socialist society, times when we tried to visualize how the revolution against capitalism would take place. But we need no looking backward by Edward Bellamy today to fire our imagination. History has spoken. The crisis of world capitalism, as expressed in the world war of 1914-1918, so undermined the capitalist structure in Czarist Russia, so let loose the class forces, that the proletariat with the aid of the peasantry actually made a successful proletarian revolution, a social revolution, a Socialist revolution. The Russian proletarian revolution is the greatest historical reality. It is of the most tremendous significance and consequence to the entire world and especially to the exploited and oppressed masses. Above everything else, it blazes out a path, gives the needed direction and dynamics to the working classes for a way out of capitalism.

The Russian proletarian revolution also provides us with the lessons of the building of Socialism, the actual construction of the new Socialist order.

No genuine Socialist can ignore the Russian revolution. No genuine Socialist can hesitate concerning its stirring, eventful, and momentous portent.

Thomas and the Russian Revolution

What, however, is the attitude of Norman Thomas on the Russian proletarian revolution. The attitude of Norman Thomas is a peculiar one. Knowing full well that in the labor movement there is a genuine support of the Soviet Union, he carefully avoids a break with this sympathetic support—which would occur if he openly, frankly and bravely stated what is actually on his mind. He therefore insinuates his opposition behind a thin veil of apparent support. Says Norman Thomas:

"Communism is a militant atheism, held with all the fervor of religion; it is an authoritarian dogmatism which boasts that it is scientific; it proclaims a creed of universal validity which in Russia it has adapted to hard facts with extraordinary genius for compromise; it is international in principle and appeals to industrial workers everywhere; yet in the country of its origin and power it owes its survival in no small degree to the national loyalty of non-Communist peasants. Communism asserts that it is the true and only Marxism yet it has been won in a country feudal and agricultural in character where the Marxian cycle of development thru capitalism to Socialism has been obviously less complete. Finally it teaches that society or the working class is everything, the individual nothing, yet it is doubtful if it would exist in anything like its present form or power if Nicolai Lenin had been killed before the November Revolution; and in acknowledgment of its debt to him, Communism has made of his tomb a shrine and of himself a saint, almost a demi-god. His successor Joseph Stalin, who holds no office save secretary of the Communist Party, is the virtual dictator in Russia and probably thru the international organization of Communism the most influential man in all the world."

Let us examine this remarkable statement. Communism is a militant atheism, etc., says Norman Thomas. It is neither a militant atheism nor a fervent religion. Communism is a state of society based upon socialized planned economy for use, in which exploitation of one class by another has been definitely abolished. It is the antithesis of capitalism. Nevertheless Norman Thomas knowing this and further, as a parson, knowing something about religion, deliberately tries to confuse Communism with the Communists, the Communist Party, the Soviet Union, etc.

In Russia the Communists succeeded in taking advantage of favorable conditions to lead the masses to make a proletarian social revolution and to establish their own government. The Communists in Russia, thru their Party and thru the government, are endeavoring to establish a Socialist economy that will eventually, when the conditions are ripe, make possible the realization of a Communist society.

Either Thomas is a Socialist or he is not! When he sneers that Communism is an authoritarian dogmatism which boasts that it is scientific, he deliberately ignores the whole literature of Communism which is based upon a thorough investigation of social-economic phenomena in order to determine the laws of social evolution and where they lead to. Communism is not a utopian idealism but rests upon the rock foundation of science. Communism compromises with no one. But the revolutionary government has been forced, in order to maintain its

power and build Socialism, to compromise within Russia with capitalist forces and outside of Russia with those forces also. The Soviet Union operates in a world of enemies. But Norman Thomas neglects to note what is the kernel, the decisive point in an estimation of the Soviet Union: that all these compromises have not deterred the Communists from the main line of development—which has been and continues to be in the direction of building up Socialism.

The Marxism of Norman Thomas

Too bad that Norman Thomas cannot appreciate the necessity of the alliance of the workers and peasants against capitalism! It is akin to his position that only when capitalism has reached its highest state of development, is proletarian revolution possible. Evidently Norman Thomas considers the peasantry the natural ally of the capitalists and his Marxism is to wait until capitalism is in "full bloom" before starting revolution, even if the conditions are most favorable. Norman Thomas's tactics on the peasantry are suicidal for the workers. His Marxism would stagger Marx himself. Norman Thomas doubts if Communism (he means the Soviet Union) would exist if Lenin was killed before the revolution. This great Socialist Thomas wants to impress on. Not conditions were responsible but Lenin was responsible! Then why did us with the "great man" theory of history not Lenin prevail in 1905? Because the material conditions for the proletarian revolution had not yet ripened. The far-sightedness and ability of Lenin were a contributing factor to the success of the revolution but the revolution itself was the result of the piling up of favorable objective circumstances. The Communist Party took advantage of the favorable opportunities to lead the masses in successful revolution. If only Lenin has not lived, then the situation would have been different and, according to Norman Thomas, so much pleasanter. But with Lenin dead we now have Stalin a virtual "dictator" in Russia and the most influential man in the world. That is bad according to Thomas. This is how he dismisses such a world-stirring, epoch-making event as the Russian revolution.

How gently and with what feeling

Norman Thomas treats Kerensky who tried to direct the revolution into the camp of the allied imperialists! Norman Thomas writes:

"He (Alexander Kerensky) was a Socialist idealist without extraordinary administrative gifts his position required who made the amazing mistake of trying to continue Russia's active participation in the war that had brought about the Czar's downfall without any help from his allies in bringing about the general peace which he desired."

Kerensky a Socialist idealist and desirous of general peace! Just like Norman Thomas! A Socialist idealist who does not want to crush the capitalists and endeavors to lead the workers and peasants to war uphold allied imperialism! It is lucky the workers of Russia made short work of Kerensky.

But Thomas as much as he does not admire the Bolshevik revolution must admit that it was almost bloodless. He says:

"The Bolshevik or November revolution, like its predecessor eight months earlier, was in itself almost bloodless."

In spite of this statement Norman Thomas is profuse with statements against revolution, against dictatorship, against Communism as "tactics of catastrophe." He shuts his eyes to the whole bloody course of imperialism whether it is cloaked in royal, democratic or Fascist robes.

Norman Thomas blames intervention for the success of the Communists in Russia. He writes:

"But possibly all this might have been in vain had it not been for the ineptness—to put it mildly—of the allies and the United States in subsidizing stupid and brutal counter-revolution and in actual intervention on Russian soil. This intervention was enough to arouse the latent nationalism of the peasants and even of some of the old military officers under the Czar in the support of the Fatherland."

He does not see the damage done by the intervention, the economic and human costs to the revolutionary workers government. But only if the capitalists had not intervened and aroused the peasants there would have been no Communist regime in Russia! If not for the counter-revolution and intervention the Russian revolution would have made much more progress in its economic and constructive work. That is the fact Norman Thomas refuses to see and ignores.

(Continued in next issue)

The Capitalist System and the Workers

THE 'AMERICAN STANDARD OF LIVING'

by A. E.

The favorite theme of the hallelujah singers during the late lamented "prosperity days" was "That Wonderful New Standard of Living." On every side we were being told that the American worker was enjoying a standard of living never dreamed of before, were wallowing in comforts and luxuries beyond the attainment of the princes of former ages. Presidents of the United States, presidents of huge corporations, and presidents of labor unions joined in this chorus. Somehow those fateful days in November 1929 have considerably subdued this overflowing exuberance. A little examination of what this famous "standard of living" of the golden prosperity really amounted to would not be out of place today.

In an interesting article in the *New York Times* of May 10, 1931, Louis Dublin, the well-known statistician, gives some very significant figures. He gives figures showing the distribution of annual family expenditures of (1) wage-earners in the United States and (2) a group of professors of the University of California. Note that the comparison is not made between wage-earners and the real masters of modern economic life, the millionaires and multimillionaires, but between the wage-earners and moderately prosperous professionals. Here are the figures:

I. WAGE-EARNERS IN THE U. S.		
	Amount	Percent
Total	\$1,513.29	100.00
Food	548.51	36.3
Shelter & upkeep	342.14	22.6
Clothing	237.60	15.7
Miscellaneous	385.04	25.4

II. UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS		
	Amount	Percent
Total	\$3,511.77	100.00
Food	893.73	25.4
Shelter & upkeep	1,617.60	46.3
Clothing	487.26	13.9
Miscellaneous	2,512.68	71.6

In other words, food, shelter and clothing, the necessities of mere existence amount to three-quarters of the expenses of the working class family, leaving only one-quarter of the income to be devoted to miscellaneous which include all the so-called "better things of life."

If we add to this, the expenditures of health, insurance and savings, expenses incurred in keeping "fit for work," we find that no less than 94% of the annual income is used up in these bare necessities. Less than 6% of the yearly income remain for the "better things

of life" as they are understood by the American worker—education, recreation, church, gifts, etc. And education and recreation, which are surely the most important of these "better things of life," get a quota of 2.3% of the annual income! The amounts spent are: \$17.90 (education) and \$18.90 (recreation). The table of "miscellaneous expenses":

III. DISTRIBUTION OF "MISCELLANEOUS ITEM"				
Wage-Earners in U.S.A.		University Professors		
	Amount	%	Amount	%
Total	\$385.04	25.4	\$2,512.68	71.6
Health	40.39	4.0	313.03	5.6
Insurance	43.28	2.9	742.08	13.0
Savings	78.93	5.2		
Education	17.92	1.1	329.80	5.9
Recreation	18.90	1.2	286.50	5.1
Church, gifts, etc.	34.95	2.3	359.80	6.5
Carfare	23.99	1.6		
Automobiles	16.33	1.0	381.77	6.9
All others	90.45	6.0	95.70	1.7

Two interesting comparisons may be made. The percentage expenditure of the American working class family in recent years for recreation was 1.2%; the percentage expenditure of the Saxon working class family in 1857 was 1.0%! A difference of seventy-five years, of the old world and the new, but the percentage spent for "enjoying oneself" remains the same! Now let us compare the working class family expenditures with those of the professional family. The latter spends only 57% of its annual income for food, clothing and shelter. Of course, in dollars and cents, it spends more than the working class family, but since its income is higher it spends less proportionately. Both absolutely and relatively does the moderately prosperous professional family spend more upon the "better thing of life" than the working class family.

All of these figures mean this: In the most hectic days of "prosperity" the worker's income went practically exclusively for food, clothing and shelter, that is to cover the necessities of life (to keep himself in working condition) and to raise his family. Only the barest margin of his income could go to the wide variety of interests that go under the general head of "enjoying life!"

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TAGNATION characterized the week, except for European economic developments, particularly German, which became much worse. Movements on the stock market were insignificant. Steel operations continue at about 40%. Auto production and building construction awards are tapering off. Bank clearings and