

THE HAUNTED HOUSE ON THIRTEENTH STREET

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

I do not believe in ghosts. I have never thought it possible that a man who died reactionary in the 1850's could study the "Fundamentals of Communism" in Spiritland and return a full-fledged Communist to haunt a broken down building on 13th Street in 1935. But the reader must believe me as an eye-witness with material proofs when I say that on July 4, 1935, the spirit of a long dead reactionary, Daniel Webster, became a contributor to the Daily Worker! And on July 5 and 6 and 7 and the days following at least till July 19, when I became so used to the wonder that I ceased observing it, old Daniel continued to appear in a prominent place on the bottom of the last page of the only American revolutionary daily.

WHO WAS DANIEL WEBSTER?

I am too bewildered after his admission into the Communist Party to say who Daniel Webster is, but I can say who he was, since he left ample records of his views and a powerful impress of his personality on the pages of our history. From what he was I would never conclude that he could have anything to do with the Communists or the Communist Party with him.

CHAMPION OF CONSERVATISM

Alexander Hamilton, John Marshall and Daniel Webster are the three most conservative figures that ever attained great prominence in American political life. Webster was not merely a conservative viewed from the standpoint of the present and the future, but he was, as Federalist and Whig, an extreme reactionary even in the eyes of his moderate contemporaries. His admiring biographer Fisher writes of him that he was "the hope and reliance of the moneyed and conservative classes, the merchants, manufacturers, capitalists and bankers."

The moderately progressive Lowell pronounced him "a statesman who had communicated no impulse to any of the great ideas of the century, a statesman whose soul had been absorbed in tariffs, banks, and the Constitution, instead of devoting himself to the freedom of the future."

Whittier, the abolitionist poet, in the stirring poem "Ichabod", mourned over his "dim, dishonest brow" and penned his epitaph as morally dead, long before his physical death, because of his defense of the fugitive slave law of 1850.

All that was progressive and forward-looking in his own day, found a conscious and powerful enemy in Daniel Webster. All friends of freedom and democracy had sooner or later to fight him.

He began his career as the lawyer for the trustees of Dartmouth, in the famous Dartmouth College Case, and was sustained by John Marshall in a decision which proclaimed contracts beyond the reach of legislative power or popular will to annul, thereby "assuring greater security for private property than exists under any other judicial system in the world." (Parrington)

His next exploit was a furious battle against universal manhood suffrage in 1820, wherein he argued that all revolutions that had shaken society to its foundations had been revolts against property; that "the object of society is the protection of something in which the members possess unequal shares, (hence) it is just that the weight of each person in the common councils should bear a relation and proportion to his interest . . . It seems to me to be plain, that, in the absence of military force, political power naturally and necessarily goes into the hands which hold the property."

He fought for high protective tariff against the farmers and workmen; defended the Bank against Jackson; as Secretary of State, forced a treaty on China, sent a naval expedition to open the gates of Japan by bribery or force and, in the words of Seward "quietly coerced" Japan into "friendship" and advocated the conquest of California and Hawaii.

"When it was discovered," writes Beard, "that his salary as United States Senator was not sufficient to keep him in that style of living which he had chosen for himself, a number of wealthy men raised a capital fund and placed the income at his service . . . as the one spokesman of the capitalistic interests . . . who towered above all others."

This Daily Worker contributor was an active opponent of the Abolitionists. "I am against agitators, North and South," he thundered in the Senate. Surely he must be rubbing his sightless eye sockets in astonishment at finding himself today in the columns of a Communist Daily!

More than any other statesman in our history is Daniel Webster responsible for the reactionary cult of the "perfect", "unchanging" and "sacred" constitution. He loved its defense of property; he lauded its checks and balances upon the legislative department because the latter is too responsive to the people; he urged that proposals for social change should not be examined as right or wrong, beneficial or injurious, progressive or retrogressive, but as "constitutional" or "unconstitutional". On the fugitive slave law he proclaimed:

"Sir, the principle of the restoration of runaway slaves is not objectionable, unless the constitution is objectionable . . . What right have they, in their legislative capacity or any other capacity, to endeavor to get around this constitution, or to embarrass the free exercise of the rights secured by the constitution to the persons whose slaves escape from them?"

Or the Reactionary Ghost That Joined the Communist Party

Out of such an historical context, have the editors of the Daily Worker wrenched a sentence to serve the purposes of the revolutionary movement of the present and future!

WHOSE DANIEL WEBSTER IS IT?

In conjuring up such ghosts from the deservedly dead past, the editors of the Daily Worker are playing a dangerous game—the game of modern reaction. By no stretch of the imagination does Daniel Webster belong to the forces of progress, either of our days or even of his own. By appealing to his authority we give our endorsement to such appeals, and aid the reactionaries of today to strangle the living present with the bony hands of the dead past. Daniel Webster is made to order, for the purposes of arch reaction: his "stake-in-society" theory of government, his hostility to the masses of the propertyless, his distrust of representative government, his defense of Negro slavery as "constitutional", and above all his creation of the Constitution fetishism which glorifies that document as superior to all human needs and rights—what a perfect authority for reaction to appeal to! Surely it is not the business of Communists to help in glorifying or strengthening the authority of such an enemy of progress! Surely, we cannot outsmart the Tories at that game!

HOW THE GHOST WAS SUMMONED

We have examined the antecedents of the Daniel Webster quotation in the Daily Worker in such detail, to show where such indiscriminate ancestor-worship leads. But he is by no means the only ghost that Browder and the editors of the Daily have called forth. In his Madison Square Garden speech Browder sought to glorify the American flag. In his debate with Norman Thomas he appealed to the "Star-Spangled Banner" to prove that progress by force is American! What a proof with the American Revolution, Shays' and Dorr's rebellions, John Brown's raid and the Civil War lying "idle"!

The July 4, 1935 issue of the Daily Worker is full of "Americanism", but what "Americanism"! On page 2 there is a picture of Thomas Jefferson. Now, there is much that is admirable in his life, many fine revolutionary traditions

of which the revolutionist of today can build. But the picture is headed, "He fought the Hearsts in '76"! That is not history; that is caricature! And on page 8 the joke is made complete by the publication of a picture of Benedict Arnold under the caption, "The W. R. Hearst of 1776." At such a game of vulgar, parody history the fascists can play far better than we. It is better to expose it, than feebly to imitate it in an effort to steal fascist thunder. The same page contains the quotation from Webster already referred to!

On page 5 there is a three-quarter page article on revolutionary traditions. Samuel Adams is referred to as "another who made some slight contribution to the success of the American Revolution." Those who refer to him should at least know that he was the outstanding organizer of the American Revolution and that the Committees of Correspondence and Committees of Safety he initiated were the analogs of the Jacobin Clubs in France and the Soviets in Russia. That would have been something to write about!

There are minor virtues and minor sins of omission and commission in the article but the basic error in it is the approach indicated in the introduction:

"The patrioteers are shouting in united chorus: 'give us that old-time tradition; it was good enough for our fathers and it's good enough for us.' And almost like an echo comes the reply from the revolutionists of today, who say: 'Yes, and it is good enough for us.'"

Heaven help the revolutionist of today who faces uncritically the "raw, unadulterated American traditions" of the past (these words are quoted from the same article) and seeks to claim them as his own! He is playing the enemies' game and his cause is lost if he uses such methods.

A WARNING FROM THE PAST

"The social revolution of the 19th century," wrote Marx in the Eighteenth Brumaire, "cannot draw its poetry from the past, it can draw that only from the future. It cannot start upon its work before it has stricken off all superstitions concerning the past. Former revolutionists required historic reminiscences in order to intoxicate themselves with their own issues. The revolution of the 19th century must let the dead bury their dead in order to reach its issue. With the former, the phrase surpasses the substance; with the latter, the substance surpasses the phrase."

APPEALING FROM THE DEVIL TO HIS GRANDMOTHER

When in 1926, in connection with the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Revolution of 1776, the writer of the present article together with Comrade Lovestone proposed that we Communists should dispute with the ruling class for what is truly revolutionary in America's past, that we should oppose against the indiscriminate glorification of all that was past, a critical evaluation of the past from the standpoint of the present and the future and the preservation, continuation and enlargement of that which the ruling class has abandoned, the most progressive and revolutionary traditions in our country's history—what a storm of criticism was levelled against Comrade Lovestone and me for that proposal! I was denounced by the Bittelmans and the Browners for "nationalism" and "opportunism." But our view prevailed and the result was a little pamphlet entitled: "Whose Revolution Is It? Our Heritage from 1776."

That pamphlet, however, did not claim indiscriminately the whole past, nor glorify it. It proposed "to debunk the history of 1776, throw away the chaff of chauvinism, mystification and reaction and keep and use the wheat of revolutionary traditions, methods and lessons . . . to take what is good from the past and upon it build the future . . . to use the past to build the future, not to block the present . . ."

From that day till 1935, Browder and his associates waged war upon us and that point of view as part of our general crime of "American Exceptionalism." But today Browder has swung from a purely negative, sectarian attitude toward American traditions, to its extreme opposite, an opportunist, uncritical glorification of American democracy and appeal even to such men as Daniel Webster. Verily, all deviations are Siamese twins.

Why the horde of ghosts? Why the throng of haunting shapes? The solution of this mystery story lies in the "Peoples' Front" in France. There they adopted a manifesto which read: "On July 14, 1789 the people of France destroyed the Bastille and revealed liberty to the world. (Liberty in the abstract! —BDW) One hundred and fifty years of continuous effort and revolutions have enabled them to keep and strengthen their gains." (This in the face of the decay of bourgeois democracy in imperialist France!) The manifesto defines democracy as "the rule of the majority"! It "swears to defend democracy" as such.

(Shades of Lenin!). And more of the same.

Hence Browder, whose method of analyzing the problems of American workers is the method of mechanical transplantation of Russian, German, and now French formulae—the other method would be "exceptionalism"—must have a "People's Front" at all cost here, when the main problem still is to teach the workers that the American people is divided into classes. And he must make as many vulgar, opportunist errors with America's past as Thorez is making with France's past. Therefore the Star-spangled Banner begins to crowd the Red Flag; Earl Browder sings strange tunes in sepulchral tones; the Daily Worker editorially challenges the American Legion . . . to a baseball game! (July 1, 1935); the American Youth Congress, and later Gil Green, speak of the "American Youth" without distinction of class (the "Younger Generation"); on July 4, 1933 the Youth Congress Manifesto borrows its poetry exclusively from the past; and Daniel Webster's ghost hovers over a dizzy building on 13th Street and haunts the columns of the Daily Worker every day throughout the revolutionary month of July.

Having solved the unfortunate problem of the haunted house we close with a citation to Browder and Thorez of a Seventh Congress decision:

"The Communists must in every way combat the fascist falsification of the history of the people, and do everything to enlighten the toiling masses on the past of their own people in an historically correct fashion . . . so as to link up the present struggle with the revolutionary traditions of the past." (From the resolution on Dimitroff's report).

For this viewpoint we fought, in the face of abuse, and by this viewpoint we stand. But Browder and Thorez are not "enlightening the toiling masses on the past of their own people in an historically correct fashion", instead they are befuddling them. They are not "combating the fascist falsification of history", they are aiding it. That way lies disaster! And it was one of the weaknesses of the Seventh Congress that it did not analyze past errors to guarantee sound correction, nor criticize such gross and dangerous deviations. So it is up to Party members to take matters into their own hands and once and for all lay the ghost of Daniel Webster and all that he represents.

IN AN EARLY ISSUE:

Adventures in Opportunism No. III
"The League of Windmills and Sky Pilots, or the Cardboard Shield and the Wooden Sword."
Watch for it!

LOSING THEIR CHAINS . . . by James Sand

William H. Sylvis: Unrecognized Genius

THE history of American labor leadership opens with a man of great vision, unbounded power that, despite its achievement, never reached the full flower of its potentiality because of his death before fifty. From some few specialists in the field of American labor the name of William H. Sylvis gains immediate response and praise; but to the great mass of workers he is not even a name. But one book has been devoted to him, and that written by his brother in 1872 and very difficult to obtain. Yet he is the first great proletarian; a Marxist before one can really speak of Marxism, a great labor leader before there even was a great labor movement to lead.

A TIRELESS ORGANIZER

A study of his life falls into three large categories: his work in his own occupational union, his work in the National Labor Union, and his work for, by, and with the International Working Men's Association, the First International. He was born on November 26th, 1828 in Armagh, Pennsylvania, the second son of a journeyman wagon-maker. At eleven he still had had no schooling and then he received lessons in the alphabet only after he had been hired out to a man named Pawling. At eighteen he learned his trade, iron-molding, and followed that until he threw himself with fervor and devotion into the budding labor movement. On January 10th, 1860 in a convention of 12 local molders' unions he had a motion adopted "that this convention does now resolve itself into a national union." The panic of 1857 had wiped out the small buds of a trade union movement and this young national union was to be a nucleus for the later National Labor Union. But the Civil War intervened and for a time put an end to the organization. Sylvis himself served in the Northern army for about a year, but soon returned home disgruntled.

In 1863 the union revived again and at a convention in Pittsburgh he was elected president and national organizer. He was re-elected to the presidency every year until his death. "From the day of that vote," says Stockton, the historian of the union, "the Molders entered upon a new era." On beginning his work as national organizer Sylvis said he had "no very clear conception of the extent of the task before me, or the means by which it was to be accomplished." His brother has given a graphic description of his days as organizer. "During this period," he says, "Sylvis wore clothes until they became quite threadbare, and he could wear them no longer; the shawl he wore to the day of his death was filled with little holes, burned there by the splashing of the molten iron from the ladles of molders in strange cities, whom he was beseeching to organize, and more than once he was compelled to beg a ride from place to place on an engine, because he had no money sufficient to pay his fare."

Through his efforts that year of 1863-64 all the existing locals grew stronger, 16 were reorganized, and 18 new ones were added. The Iron Molders thus had 50 local unions, practically as many as all other crafts combined. Already in 1859 in an address to the convention that founded the national union he had propounded a social doctrine far in advance of the times.

"In all countries and at all times (he wrote) capital has been used by those possessing it to monopolize particular branches of business, until the vast and various industrial pursuits of the world have been brought under the immediate control of a comparatively small portion of mankind. What position are we, the mechanics of America, to hold in society? Are we to receive an equivalent for our labor sufficient to maintain us in comparative independence and respectability, to procure the means with which to educate

our children, and qualify them to play their part in the world's drama; or must we be forced to bow the suppliant knee to wealth, and earn by unprofitable toil a life too void of solace to confirm the very claims that bind us to our doom?"

From this general humanitarian position with its deep insight into the class struggle he was to move ahead, thru an understanding of the Civil War and onrushing capitalism, to forge a doctrine as close to Marx as he could get in the few years that remained of his life.

Sylvis' work had the employers in the industry scared, and they founded an employers' association in 1863 to oppose the Molders' Union. Their prospectus has the ring of excessive modernity:

"Instead of calling upon the employers to cooperate with their union in advancing the moral, social, and intellectual condition of every moulder, which self-evidently is a matter of common interest, the 'Molders' Union' even goes so far as to expel a member as soon as he has . . . succeeded in establishing himself independently in business. . . . We deny the right of the 'Iron Moulder's Union', or any other Union, to arbitrarily determine the wages of our employees, regardless of their merits and the value of their services to us. . . . We deny the right of the 'Iron Molders' Union' to determine how many apprentices we should employ. . . . We shall resist by all legal means, at every sacrifice of time and money, all attempts of any set of men arbitrarily to regulate the supply of labor in any department of trade and business."

NATIONAL LABOR UNION IS BORN

The National Labor Union was formed in 1866 and there Sylvis was admitted as the accredited representative of the molders. Within two years he is its president and an international figure in the labor movement. At the 1867 convention in Chicago Sylvis becomes an important delegate. There, he came into conflict with a certain Mr. Gibson who opposed the organization of white workers and Negroes into the same trade unions. Mr. Gibson said it would be time enough to consider the question when Negroes applied for admission. Sylvis said in answer that the question had been already introduced into the South, the whites "striking against the blacks, and creating an antagonism which will kill off the trades' unions, unless the two be consolidated." In the same convention Sylvis was a member of the Committee on Public Lands and he submitted a resolution which was adopted. It said in part:

"The course of our legislation recently, has tended to the building up of greater monopolies, and the creation of more powerful moneyed and land aristocracies in the United States than any that now overshadows the destinies of Europe. Eight hundred millions of acres of the peoples' lands have been legislated into the hands of a few individuals, who already assume a haughty and insolent tone and bearing towards the people and government, as did the patricians of ancient Rome."

At the convention of 1868 in New York City which opened on September 21, 1868, Sylvis was in the thick of the fight. In debate on the financial question he came to a homely statement of the class struggle. He said: "Under our present monetary system, all the people who are borrowers must borrow money from bankers or brokers—money shavers. The people of the United States are divided into two classes—the skinned and the skinner—the borrowers being the skinned, and the bankers the skinner. . . . A bank in any shape is a licensed swindle; and

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