

---

# Political Prisoners in Russia.

by “James A. Marshall” [Max Bedacht]

Published in *The Worker* [New York], v. 5, whole no. 227 (June 17, 1922), pg. 5.

The Socialist Party of America and its adherents are lined up with the forces of reaction.

Feeling as they do that the Russian Revolution active as the magic mirror that showed the ugly features of friends of capitalism under their mask of revolutionary pretensions, they are busily engaged trying to slander the revolution.

Feeling as they do that the tide of revolutionary consciousness is rising and threatens to drown them, they resort to the old trick of crying “Stop, thief!”

They forget that the trick has been overplayed. The sound of “Stop, thief!” will only convince the workers that the gentlemen from the Socialist Party are trying to get away with something.

In some recent conventions like that of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Workmen’s Circle, these adherents of the Socialist Party performed such a conjurer’s trick intended for drawing the eyes of their followers from their treacherous tactics.

“Free political prisoners — in Russia!” they cried. Their beloved “democracy” has committed enough crimes in America to make the slogan of freeing political prisoners a popular one with the working masters in this country.

## Fulfill Capitalism’s Desires.

In raising that cry these so-called “Socialists” hope to create a reaction in the sympathies of the masses of the workers of this country to-

ward the Russian Revolution. That is what capitalism wants. And the Socialist Party has no reason whatever to wish for something different.

First it loves capitalism and wants to save it. And second, as long as the revolution in Russia is looked upon as an example of revolutionary working class action to be copied by the workers the world over, the treacherous role these “Socialists” are playing becomes too obvious to promise success. Therefore they cry, “Free political prisoners in Russia!”

Now let us see who the political prisoners are in Soviet Russia. Who are the persons whose release these “Socialists” demand from the Soviet Republic of Russia? They are the Anarchists, Mensheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries arrested by the Soviet authorities for counterrevolutionary activities.

## Classifying These Prisoners.

Why are they in prison? Have they been sent there for their beliefs or for their membership in their parties and groups, like the American democracy sent Communists to prison for their beliefs?

Or have they been sent to prison like some anarchists were sent there by a Socialist District Attorney in Milwaukee, for having hung up pictures of Malatesta, Bakunin, and Kropotkin in their rooms?

Or were they imprisoned like Debs because they expressed opinions and beliefs differing from

the opinions and beliefs of those in power?

The writer of this article was in Russia for a considerable length of time at two different periods since the establishment of the Soviet Republic.

He made the acquaintance of a Socialist Revolutionary in high office in the Commissariat of Health.

### **Emma Goldman Unmolested.**

He saw Emma Goldman there, free, unmolested; the same Emma Goldman that the American democracy had deported. She was utterly opposed to the Soviet regime and never hesitated to say so.

He heard Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionaries speak, and speak violently against the Communists in election meetings for the soviets and elsewhere.

He saw a sign of an anarchist club hang over the entrance of a soviet-owned and soviet-run house in Moscow. No prosecution resulted from all this.

So who are the "political prisoners" whose release the "SP-ites" of the Workmen's Circle and the ILGWU demand?

They are people who, in the name of anarchism, organized what they called expropriation expeditions, but what in reality were expeditions of banditry.

Whoever dared to protect the property of the soviets from these bandits was killed mercilessly, was murdered.

### **Fixing the Crime.**

Whoever demands the release of such bandits and murderers identifies himself with them and their acts. We do not question the SP right to do that. But to do that in the name of unsuspecting workers is a crime.

These political prisoners whose release the

"SP-ites" demand are members of the bands of Makhno and Antonov, who pillaged, robbed, and killed. While the workers of Moscow and Petrograd starved, these "politicals" held up, "expropriated," and burned trainloads of grain coming from the Ukraine or from Siberia and destined to feed the hungry workers in those cities.

They organized bands of the size of armies. With the help of them, they took villages and cities. They shot all Communists and Communist suspects they could lay their hands on. And then, these friends of Anarchy or democracy set up a military dictatorship in place of the Soviets.

To demand the release of these "politicals" is to identify oneself with their crimes. We do not question the SP-ites' right to such honors. But we ask the members of the Workmen's Circle and the ILGWU whether they want their organizations, whether they want themselves, identified with these crimes against the first Workers Republic.

"But," the gentlemen of the SP may say, "we do not mean these Anarchists, we mean the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. They are Socialists, like us."

Yes, indeed, gentlemen from the SP, they are Socialists like you are. You are just like them. You would do the same thing to a proletarian revolution in America what they did to it in Russia.

### **Aided Allied Bayonets.**

The Mensheviks organized the counterrevolutionary government in Arkhangelsk. With the aid of allied bayonets, they gave the unhappy inhabitants a taste of their democracy. At their All-Russian Conference in 1918 in Moscow, they declared in favor of the counterrevolution and issued a call for insurrection against the Soviets.

They instigated and organized strikes in the ammunition factories of the soviets at a time when the life of the Workers' Republic depended on a successful struggle against the Kolchaks, Denikins, Yudenich, Semenov, Petliura, and countless other

Whites. The Mensheviks, these enemies of terror, organized the White terror the first days of the revolution.

They put out a helping hand to the bourgeoisie when that class was terror stricken and helpless by the taking of power of the proletariat.

They took up the fight for the bourgeoisie. They organized sabotage throughout the land. Destroyed houses, locomotives, and thousands of other necessities throughout Russia still tell the tale of the deeds of those "politicals."

### **When Mensheviks Rejoice.**

The insurrection of Kaledin and of the Ukrainian Rada was supported by them. In the days when the Whites waded through streams of blood of murdered Communists in Samara and Kazan, the Mensheviks in those cities rejoiced over the victory of "order."

In their papers, which significantly were the only "Socialist" papers that could appear under white rule, they declared for a continuance of the "punishment of traitors," meaning the killing of Communists and sympathizers.

Peter Maslov, one of the best-known leaders of the Mensheviks, declared it as the foremost duty of every party member to line up actively with the counterrevolution.

These staunch believers in democracy supported every military dictatorship set up by Kolchak, Denikin, Wrangel, and others as against the Soviets.

The gentlemen of the SP sympathize with the Mensheviks in prison. But not because of abstract love for democracy and liberty, but because of their sympathy with the activities of the Mensheviks.

### **Let Them Have Courage.**

We do not dispute the right of the gentlemen from the SP to have such sympathies. On

the contrary. We think them to be quite natural. But they should have courage enough to say what they mean.

Let them say: "We are for a counterrevolution in Russia and therefore demand the release of its leaders from Russian prisons." Let them say: "The Mensheviks are our brothers and comrades. Therefore we hate their enemies."

Let them say: "We are enemies of the proletarian revolution. Therefore we are friends of the leaders of the counterrevolution and demand their release from prison."

Let them say what they think: "How can the counterrevolution which we desire with all our heart make progress as long as its most experienced and most active leaders and agents are in prison. Therefore we demand their release."

It is hypocrisy in the highest degree to exploit the slogan of "release of political prisoners" in connection with the bandits and counterrevolutionists now in prison in Soviet Russia. Although the members of the ILGWU and the Workmen's Circle are in favor of the release of political prisoners, they certainly do not wish to be identified with bandits and counterrevolutionists, played off by their friends in America, by the "Socialists," as political prisoners.

### **Aid to French Ambassador.**

Now to the Socialist Revolutionaries. Are they political prisoners in the sense of the term used in America? [Boris] Savinkov, the leader of the Right of that party, became the agent of Noulens, the French Ambassador in Petrograd, immediately after the revolution started.

With American money he started a counterrevolutionary newspaper in Petrograd after February 1917. He was the friend of Kerensky and helped organize the insurrection of Kornilov and the plot of Krasnov.

Morosiev, of the Left SR, organized the Czechoslovaks as the first military force of the

counterrevolution in Russia.

The Left SR organized the attentat against Count Mirbach. This attentat was to be the signal for a general revolt against the Soviets, organized by the SR throughout Russia.

This uprising, together with a general advance of the military forces of Germany, provoked by the killing of Mirbach, was to bring about the downfall of the revolution and the victory of counterrevolution.

These "politicals" did not succeed, it is true. But the local uprisings they kindled succeeded in prolonging the period of intensive civil war and weakened for a while the forces of the Workers Republic in their struggle against Kolchak and others. Until the final defeat of foreign intervention, the SR called for and supported foreign intervention.

### **An Empty Battle Cry.**

Antonov, who fought against the Red Army like Makhno, was a disciple of the SR. The murder of Uritsky and Volodarsky in Petrograd was organized by the SR. Lenin is yet suffering from the poisoned bullets in his body directed against him by the Executive Committee of the SR. The ruins of the former headquarters of the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party of Russia bear

yet witness of wholesale destruction and murder wrought by a bomb of the SR.

And the leaders of that party who were caught in the meshes of the Cheka as murderers and would-be murderers, as organizers of the counterrevolution, as agents of Petliura and Piłsudski, as tools of capitalism and the capitalist class, are to be released as "politicals" from Russian prisons.

Abe Cahan and his *Forward* (?!) and the whole coterie of the Socialist Party may consider it a good battle cry against Soviet Russia and against the left wing of the labor movement in this country. But the working masses will not fall for it.

The membership of the ILGWU and the Workmen's Circle and such other organizations that may be selected by the SP-ites as promising hunting grounds must and will resent this attempt of the misleaders to line them up in the defense of the counterrevolution in Russia, to line them up with Savinkov and Semёnov, to like them up with the would-be murderers of Lenin, against the first proletarian revolution, against Soviet Russia.

The cry of the Socialists, "release the political prisoners in Russia," will raise a mass protest of the workers against these Socialists, and the echo will thunder back into their faces the accusation: ***Traitors!***

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Free reproduction permitted.*