
Whippersnapper or Agent-Provocateur?

by Arnold Petersen

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In *The Communist*, official organ of the so-called “Communist Party,” issue of November 15 [1919], there appears an editorial called “The SLP in Action.” The editorial is interesting for a number of reasons, chiefly, however, because of its mixture of insolent egotism and agent-provocatourism. The editorial writer of the sheet is one Louis C. Fraina, a youngster who once went to school in the SLP but who never finished his course, either because the course was more than his flighty mentality could stand, or because he was in the SLP for an entirely different purpose.

Master Fraina pretends to be terribly indignant at what he pleases to call the SLP’s “treason to Socialism.” Socialism? When did we hear that word roll off from Master Fraina’s glib tongue before? Oh, yes, that was in a book which the precocious lad wrote in spare moments last year or the year before. Says Master Fraina in this book, *Revolutionary Socialism* † (which like most of his writings is composed of 10 percent original matter and 90 percent cribbed from other writers, the “cribbings” being slightly paraphrased to present an appearance of originality): “Socialism itself is not in tune with the new rhythm of things. Socialism, on the whole, has during the war abandoned its class attitude. Socialism has met a real and humiliating defeat; and instead of recognizing this defeat as a defeat, in the spirit of men and rebels, the tendency is either to explain away the defeat or hail it as a great victory.” Again: “Socialism has been definitely split; *a new and irrevocable formulation is necessary of fundamental Socialism.*” (Italics mine.)

The marvel of it all! The SLP has committed treason to something that is not in tune with the infinite or something; which has abandoned that which

makes it what it is, or as Master Fraina would have it, was!! Socialism, condemned and excommunicated by Master Fraina, has been sinned against by the SLP, and the implacable and honest-to-goodness revolutionary Master Fraina is wroth at the SLP!

But let us see in what way the SLP has committed “treason to Socialism.” It has stigmatized “mass action” as “meaning riots and mob violence”; it has stigmatized the “Communist Party” as “representing anarchy” — just as capitalism has done. Discounting for the moment the looseness of the language, the SLP hastens to admit its guilt — for if to expose the “Communist Party,” including its self-seeking demagogues and agent-provocateurs, is a crime against Socialism, then indeed we are guilty.

What is “mass action” as a “tactical principle”? If the would-be imitators of the Russian revolutionists have any conception of it, it is not evidenced by their literature. Summed up, their explanations amount to this: “Mass action — is mass action.” That explanation is at least as lucid and profound as this one taken from Master Fraina’s book referred to above: “War develops out of the class struggle and the class struggle develops in and through war.” By constant employment of meaningless tautologies and nebulous phrases these fellows imagine that they are impressing the world profoundly. “Mass action” has no meaning and can have no meaning in the language of Socialism except as the final act in the crowing, triumphant climax of social revolution. As a “tactical fundamental” (!) it is silly. As the crowning act of the revolution “mass action” has meaning only if considered in relation to the particular phase of development in a given country. In Russia “mass action” consisted in the seizing of power

†- Louis C. Fraina, *Revolutionary Socialism: A Study in Socialist Reconstruction*. (New York: The Communist Press, 1918).

by a revolutionary minority, driven to this act, not merely by choice, but because, indeed, they could not help themselves. In Russia such “mass action” was (in the light of our present knowledge of conditions and events) not only possible, it was necessary, even though the Bolsheviki might have felt that this “power” would be short-lived.

In the United States “mass action,” as the crowning climax of the social revolution, must consist *in the industrially organized proletariat assuming control, “taking and holding,” the means of production*, administering these through the industrial union. Here, too, there is no question of choice. If success is to crown our efforts, if the social revolution means more to us than a glib phrase to be rolled complacently on oily tongues, then indeed we can not help pursuing this course.

“Mass action” in any other sense, whether as a “tactical fundamental” or a “tactical ephemeral,” can result in nothing else than anarchy, and is indeed the very essence of anarchy. The mass includes all layers — capitalists, their lickspittles, agent-provocateurs, dampheois [?], and honest but misguided workers. Any organization that advocates “mass action” in this country, at this stage, and without implying that such action is to be exercised through the integral Socialist industrial union — such an organization is anarchistic, all its pretenses to the contrary notwithstanding.

Says the smart little boy wonder of *The Communist*:

...according to the SLP the Communist International must, therefore, be an aggregation of Anarchists. And the SLP denies that it repudiates the Communist International!

Here the flippant whippersnapper exposes himself. Because the SLP, in entire harmony with Marxism, insists that tactics and the particular form of revolutionary acts must be in conformity with the economic and political development of a given country, therefore it “repudiates the Communist International.” This statement is entirely in line with Master Fraina’s conception of Historical Materialism, which conception was neatly exposed some years ago by Comrade Olive M. Johnson, the occasion being the young hopeful’s condemnation of Charles Dickens because, forsooth, he did not write his stories as a revolutionary Socialist!

To quote further:

The SLP officials are a pretty (?) bourgeois aggregation of mongers of phrases. During the war, the SLP played a cowardly role; we remember the editorial plea of *The Weekly People*, at the time of the second Espionage Act was being passed, concerning the SLP being lawful and believing in lawful agitation...

Here the agent-provocateur, not merely the whippersnapper, speaks. The SLP is called cowardly because it insists on pursuing the course laid down years ago by DeLeon, a course that has been more than justified by events. And this course we pursue, not because we dare not do otherwise, but because to do otherwise would be to commit an act of treason to the working class of America, and therefore to the working class of the world. The Constitution of the United States, defective as it is in other respects, possesses this redeeming feature, a feature that distinguishes it from other documents of class society: it provides for its own amendment even to the point of complete rejection. Lincoln has called attention forcibly to this feature when he said:

“This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it.” (First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861.)

Accordingly, seeing that lawful procedure is entirely compatible with “revolutionary rights” and Socialist tactics in this country, who but an ass or an agent-provocateur would argue or suggest any other course? And what sort of “political party” is it that denies the very essence of that which in this country makes parties possible and which gives meaning to the term “political party”? For unlike most other countries no party of revolution can exist here which has for its demands merely political rights, since these rights are guaranteed by the Constitution. That these rights are violated is as much due to working class inertia as to capitalist aggression.

Master Fraina gets off this chunk of wisdom:

Mass action is not Anarchy. The SLP, the petty officials of which claim a monopoly of revolutionary knowledge, should know of the controversy between Anton Pannekoek and Karl Kautsky, in which Kautsky claimed that mass action and mass strikes represented slum-proletarianism and anarchy, and Pannekoek’s brilliant answers to Kautsky’s stupid misconceptions.

The writer has a vague recollection of this controversy, which, if I mistake not, was printed in the *New York Call* some 8 or 10 years ago. While the details of the arguments pro and con have been mostly forgotten, I remember distinctly asking myself: Who is the bigger ass — Kautsky or Pannekoek?! And I asked this while crediting both with having produced some excellent works on Socialism — particularly Kautsky. That Kautsky today stands where he does is a matter calling for pity rather than wonder.

The male edition of Daisy Ashford (the girl wonder who wrote a book at 9 years of age) refers to *The Weekly People* accounts of the IWW trials in a manner as though *The Weekly People* had purposely and deliberately assisted the government in its case against the IWW. He is a rascal who makes such a charge or insinuation. *The Weekly* (and while in existence *The Daily People*) ever exposed the Anarcho-Syndicalist IWW — pointed to its slum proletarianism, its physical force advocacy and veiled dynamitism, prophesying that it would land where it did land. Not for the purpose of shooting bullets into a dead carcass, but for the purpose of pointing the moral and repeating the warning to the working class of America did *The Weekly People* report the IWW trial as it did, giving all the facts. The IWW is a sinister outfit, and one of the mortal enemies of working class emancipation. The so-called “Communist Party of America” is to all appearances its next of kin, and if it continues as it has started it will prove a worthy successor to the IWW in steering unthinking workers into the shambles to the greater glory of capitalist imperialism.

In the foregoing Master Fraina has been exposed in one aspect. A few examples will show that he is a literary fraud to boot. In 1909, the youngster (then a babe of 16 or 17 summers) delivered a lecture on “The Social Revolution.” With all the rodomontade and bombast of precocious youth he discoursed learnedly on this important subject, displaying a “knowledge” which, were it real, would be one of the marvels of the age. His “knowledge” receives a rather unfortunate background by a carelessness which he committed. In lifting a part from one of LaFargue’s works he forgot to change the phraseology. LaFargue, on page 97, *Social and Philosophical Studies*, says in a footnote:

Cain, driven from his clan after the murder of Abel, laments: “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold thou has driven me from the land. I shall be a wanderer and fugitive over the earth and it shall come to pass that whosoever findeth me shall slay me. (Genesis IV: 13-14)

Master Fraina, in the above-mentioned lecture (printed in part in *The Weekly People*, Feb. 5, 1910), concludes a very “learned” and highly original (?) footnote as follows:

Cain, driven from his clan after the murder of Abel, laments: “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold...”

and so forth.

In his book, *Revolutionary Socialism*, he writes:

Imperialism characterizes the new, the final stage of Capitalism. It characterizes, equally, the unity of all the forces of Capitalism into a new and more formidable instrument of conquest and spoilation, its utter disintegration and collapse. Imperialism, accordingly, is a fundamental manifestation of Capitalism, Capitalism at the climax of its development.

The footnote reads as follows:

“Imperialism is a specific historical stage of Capitalism. Its peculiarities are threefold: Imperialism means (1) monopolistic Capitalism; (2) parasitic, or stagnant Capitalism; and (3) dying Capitalism... Imperialism, the most advanced stage of Capitalism in America and Europe, and later of Asia, became fully developed in the period from 1898 to 1914. The Spanish-American War (1898), the Anglo-Boer War (1900-1902), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and the economic crisis in Europe (1910), are the chief historical milestones of this new era of universal history.” —N. Lenin, “Imperialism and the Socialist Schism,” *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata*, December 1916.

In other words, Master Fraina finds a statement by Lenin which sounds pretty good to him. He conceives of the somewhat hackneyed idea of writing a book about it. He paraphrases Lenin’s original statement slightly, and to prove what an intellectual marvel he is, he puts Lenin’s statement as a footnote in his book, thus demonstrating conclusively that he and Lenin came to the same conclusion. Perfectly simple, if you only know how!

Examples could be piled on top of these, but they should suffice — for the present at least. They prove my assertion that the boy wonder and Protean marvel is a literary fraud — to use the mildest possible expression.

Master Fraina joined the SLP back in 1908 or 1909, “graduating” from the SP. In 1913 he left the SLP — to return to the SP, which he hailed as the permanent expression of American Socialism, or words to that effect, incidentally attempting to discredit (in conjunction with Solon DeLeon) the master mind of Marxism, Daniel DeLeon. The silly youngster succeeded, of course, in exposing his own profound ignorance only. During the last couple of years he was active in the SP, pretending to work for the “capture” of that organization. During the current year he was associated with John Reed and others in an attempt at capturing the SP National Convention. The “Michigan group” of the revolting SP membership ridiculed the idea of waiting for the SP convention, insisting that the break should be made at once. Suddenly Master Fraina changed front. From an avowed opponent of the “Michigan group” program, he becomes one of them, deserting his erstwhile associates, John Reed and others. As someone put it: He waited until he saw which way the cat was going to jump — He jumped to where he thought the meal ticket was safest. If incidentally that involved swallowing the “Michigan” program (which is diametrically opposed to the “Communist Party” program, the Michiganders ridiculing mass action, etc.) that was merely an incident in the “tactical fundamentals” of the “meal struggle” of the Frainas, and not at all partaking of “revolutionary dishonor” (distant relative, I suppose, of *The Times*’ “Non-Bolshevik sense of honor”).

During normal time the Frainas could be ignored. Their capacity for harm is limited by their clumsiness and the manifest fraudulent character of their claims. We are living in extraordinary times, however, and insignificant as these creatures are, their capacity for harm is now multiplied by all the factors making for a capitalist massacre of the working class. It must be clear to the least-thinking that the one great aim of the capitalist class is to goad the workers into committing acts of violence, so as to provide the necessary justification for inflicting a terrible slaughter on them, calculated to strike terror in the hearts of the workers. The Frainas are the tools (willing or unwilling) of the murderous capitalist class. *Without them this class might not, probably would not, succeed in their murderous attempt; with them their success is assured.*

The performance of these fakers and adventur-

ers (if nothing worse) receives its farcical touch through their stupid efforts at aping the Russian Bolsheviks. An English SLP man in a recent letter to the writer, speaking of the mass actionists, tersely sums their action up in the following words:

...talking about “mass action,” “revolutionary situations,” and the like... Every time they are faced with a demand for action they curl up and give us a feast of words and phrases. They rant about Lenin and forming Soviets, and do not know what the Soviet is. *Whilst Lenin is driven by developments towards the Industrial Union conception of DeLeon, as the permanent basis of the Soviets, the “mass actionists” are moving away from Industrial Unionism and adopting the indefinite and nebulous Workshop Committee organization.* Industrial unionism...is brushed aside as old fashioned. Workshop committees being indefinite gives them more scope for nebulous chin wagging.

This is well put and describes the Frainas perfectly. Bankrupt and dishonest, they stand convicted as incompetents, as misleaders of the working class. Yet this aggregation has the temerity to point the finger of reproof at the SLP.

Master Fraina ends his lampoon against the SLP with an appeal to the SLP members to “repudiate this monstrosity,” adding, “for the officials of the SLP have neither revolutionary integrity nor revolutionary honor.”

The Burlesque Bolsheviks hath spoken.

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To the honest and sincere rank and file of the “Communists,” the SLP utters a warning. Beware of the fellow who talks or suggests by innuendo force and violence. He is either an ignorant dangerous fool, or he is a scheming, and still more dangerous, agent of capitalism. We point to the fact that the SLP represents true revolutionary Socialism in America. We remind you of Lenin’s admiration for the principles of the SLP, showing that he recognizes the SLP to be what we know it is. And we want to impress upon honest and sincere members of the Communist (and Communist Labor) Party that (assuming they are deadly in earnest, and discounting for the nonce the “mass action” and similar absurdities), they are performing an act of political scabbery in maintaining an organization which pretends to stand for revolutionary Socialism and which certainly has repudiated the bourgeois

and reformist Socialist Party. It is an act of political scabbery for which they (and particularly their egotistical or corrupt leaders) will be called to account when an enlightened working class is ready to “close the books.” Repent in time. Repudiate your “mass action” and veiled advocacy of violence, cast out the ignorant whippersnapper and the agent-provocateur, and join the only organization that holds high the beacon light, and whose sturdy hammering of the capitalist armor has never for an instant ceased.

The SLP is here to stay and will remain in the field until its banner waves triumphantly over an emancipated working class.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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